AUTUMN FICTION SPECIAL

argosy

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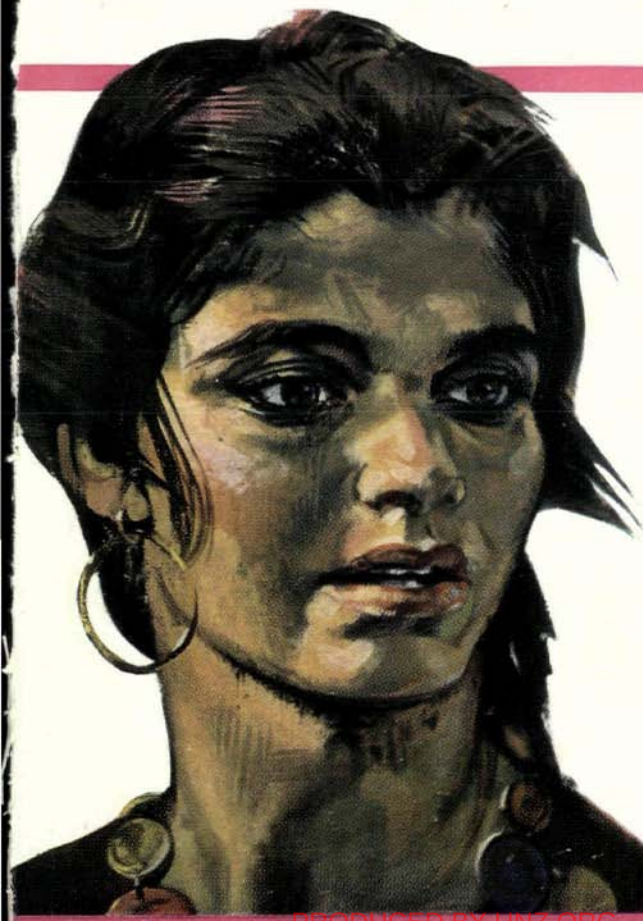

WOMAN OF THE MARSH

by DARRELL BATES

PLUS 12 EXCITING STORIES

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Vol. XXVI No. 11 **NOVEMBER 1965**

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a pause for thought on what Argosy is all about

I SUSPECT that the fourth thing primeval man learned to say (after "I love you," "I hate you," and "Help!") was: "Tell me a story." Since then, no-one who could listen or read has been altogether alone in the world.

The wish of the many to be told a story, and the ability of the few to tell one, is as old as the birth of imagination and as enduring as the need to communicate. The story-teller who sat and yarned by a cave fire in the long night before history began is in a direct line with the film producer and television director of today.

The forms change, but the need for the magic of the story lasts.

Of all the forms, the written short story is probably the most satisfying to the most people. There are examples preserved on papyrus, which date back to 1,300 years before the birth of Christ (who Himself utilised the story-teller's art).

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by Lawrence Hammond

Editor of Argosy

The earliest stories which have been found—from ancient Egypt—give pictures of social and domestic life which have the ring of truth; some seem to be biographical, and they are touched with imagination which moulds and transcends facts as life itself never can. The recipe is not so different today.

You can measure the strength of the short story by the number of times it has falsely been declared dead as a form of literature and entertainment. It is far from dead, both in the number of people writing short stories, as well as reading them.

Every week some five hundred stories come into the office of Argosy. Every month for nearly forty years, Argosy has published the best of them.

Since Argosy was founded, it has had one criterion: to publish the best short stories, from wherever they come, by whomsoever written.

We hope that Argosy will go on publishing, every month, the best short stories for as long as people want to write them and to read them.

We think it does a magazine good to pause now and again and take stock of itself. Hence the above words. They are taken from the Introduction to a new book which we warmly commend to Argosy readers—The Argosy Bedside Book. This fine volume is not only a source of entertainment—it is also a book you will want to keep. It has just been published by Odhams Books at 21s., and you will find further information about it in this month's announcement on Page 143.

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The explosive author of Another Country, one of the most widely-read and argued-about books of the day, makes his first appearance in Argosy with a new story that is shaped by the tensions of life in New York's Harlem

JAMES BALDWIN

THE ROCK PILE

ACROSS the street from their house, in an empty lot between two houses, stood the rockpile. It was a strange place to find a mass of natural rock jutting out of the ground; and someone, probably Aunt Florence, had once told them that the rock was there and could not be taken away because without it the subway cars underground would fly apart, killing all the people. This, touching on some natural mystery concerning the surface and the centre of the earth, was far too intriguing an explanation to be challenged, and it invested the rockpile, moreover, with such mysterious importance that Roy felt it to be his right, not to say his duty, to play there.

Other boys were to be seen there each afternoon after school and all day Saturday and Sunday. They fought on the rockpile. Sure-footed, dangerous, and reckless, they rushed each other and grappled on the heights, sometimes disappearing down the other side in a confusion of dust and screams and up-ended, flying feet.

"It's a wonder they don't kill themselves," their mother said, watching sometimes from the fire-escape. "You children

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stay away from there, you hear me?" Though she said children, she was looking at Roy, where he sat beside John on the fire-escape, "The good Lord knows," she continued, "I don't want you to come home bleeding like a hog every day the Lord sends."

Roy shifted impatiently, and continued to stare at the street, as though in this gazing he might somehow acquire wings. John said nothing. For he had not really been spoken to: he was afraid of the rockpile and of the boys who played there.

Each Saturday morning John and Roy sat on the fire-escape and watched the forbidden street below. Sometimes their mother sat in the room behind them, sewing, or dressing their younger sister, or nursing the baby, Paul. The sun fell across them and across the fire-escape with a high, benevolent indifference; below them, men and women, and boys and girls, sinners all, loitered: sometimes one of the church members passed and saw them and waved. Then, for the moment that they waved decorously back, they were intimidated. They watched the saint, man or woman, until he or she had disappeared from sight. The passage of one of the redeemed made them consider, however vacantly, the wickedness of the street, their own latent wickedness in sitting where they sat; and made them think of their father, who came home early on Saturdays and who would soon be turning this corner and entering the dark hall below them.

But until he came to end their freedom, they sat, watching and longing above the street. At the end of the street nearest their house was the bridge which spanned the Harlem River and led to a city called the Bronx: which was where Aunt Florence lived. Nevertheless, when they saw her coming, she did not come from the bridge, but from the opposite end of the street. This, to their minds weakly, she explained by saying that she had taken the subway, not wishing to walk, and that, besides, she did not live in *that* section of the Bronx. Knowing that the Bronx was across the river, they did not believe this story ever, but, adopting towards her their father's attitude, assumed that she had just left some sinful place which she dared not name, as, for example, a movie palace.

In the summer-time boys swam in the river, diving off the wooden dock, or wading in from the garbage-heavy bank. Once a boy, whose name was Richard, drowned in the river. His mother had not known where he was; she had come to their house, to ask if he was there. Then, in the evening,

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at six o'clock, they had heard from the street a woman screaming and wailing; and they ran to the windows and looked out. Down the street came the woman, Richard's mother, screaming, her face raised to the sky and tears running down her face. A woman walked beside her, trying to make her quiet and trying to hold her up. Behind them walked a man, Richard's father, with Richard's body in his arms. There were two white policemen walking in the gutter, who did not seem to know what should be done. Richard's father and Richard were wet, and Richard's body lay across his father's arms like a cotton baby. The woman's screaming filled all the street; cars slowed down and the people in the cars stared; people opened their windows and looked out and came rushing out of doors to stand in the gutter, watching. Then the small procession disappeared within the house which stood beside the rockpile. Then, "*Lord, Lord, Lord!*" cried Elizabeth, their mother, and slammed the window down.

One Saturday, an hour before his father would be coming home, Roy was wounded on the rockpile and brought screaming upstairs. He and John had been sitting on the fire-escape and their mother had gone into the kitchen to sip tea with Sister McCandless. By and by Roy became bored and sat beside John in restless silence; and John began drawing into his school book a newspaper advertisement which featured a new electric locomotive. Some friends of Roy passed beneath the fire-escape and called him. Roy began to fidget, yelling down to them through the bars. Then a silence fell. John looked up. Roy stood looking at him.

"I'm going downstairs," he said.

"You better stay where you is, boy. You know Mama don't want you going downstairs."

"I be right *back*. She won't even know I'm gone—'less you run and tell her."

"I ain't *got* to tell her. What's going to stop her from coming in here and looking out the window?"

"She's talking," Roy said. He started into the house.

"But Daddy's going to be home soon!"

"I be back before *that*. What you all the time got to be so *scared* for?" He was already in the house and he now turned, leaning on the windowsill, to swear impatiently, "I be back in *five* minutes."

John watched him sourly as he carefully unlocked the door and disappeared. In a moment he saw him on the pavement

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with his friends. He did not dare to go and tell his mother that Roy had left the fire-escape because he had practically promised not to. He started to shout, "*Remember, you said five minutes!*" but one of Roy's friends was looking up at the fire-escape. John looked down at his school book; he became engrossed again in the problem of the locomotive.

When he looked up again he did not know how much time had passed, but now there was a gang fight on the rockpile. Dozens of boys fought each other in the harsh sun; clambering up the rocks and battling hand to hand, scuffed shoes sliding on the slippery rock; filling the bright air with curses and jubilant cries. They filled the air, too, with flying weapons: stones, sticks, tin-cans, garbage, whatever could be picked up and thrown. John watched in a kind of absent amazement—until he remembered that Roy was still downstairs, and that he was one of the boys on the rockpile. Then he was afraid; he could not see his brother among the figures in the sun; and he stood up, leaning over the fire-escape railing. Then Roy appeared from the other side of the rocks; John saw that his shirt was torn; he was laughing. He moved until he stood at the very top of the rockpile. Then, something, an empty tin-can, flew out of the air and hit him on the forehead, just above the eye. Immediately, one side of Roy's face ran with blood, he fell and rolled on his face down the rocks.

Then for a moment there was no movement at all, no sound; the sun, arrested, lay on the street and the pavement and the arrested boys. Then someone screamed or shouted; boys began to run away, down the street, towards the bridge. The figure on the ground, having caught its breath and felt its own blood, began to shout. John cried, "Mama! Mama!" and ran inside.

"Don't fret, don't fret," panted Sister McCandless as they rushed down the dark, narrow, swaying stairs, "don't fret. Ain't a boy been born don't get his knocks every now and again. *Lord!*" They hurried into the sun.

A man had picked Roy up and now walked slowly towards them. One or two boys sat silent on their stoops; at either end of the street there was a group of boys watching. "He ain't hurt bad," the man said, "wouldn't be making this kind of noise if he was hurt real bad."

Elizabeth, trembling, reached out to take Roy, but Sister McCandless, bigger, calmer, took him from the man and threw him over her shoulder as she once might have handled

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a sack of cotton. "God bless you," she said to the man, "God bless you, son."

Roy was still screaming. Elizabeth stood behind Sister McCandless to stare at his bloody face. "It's just a flesh wound," the man kept saying, "just broke the skin, that's all." They were moving across the pavement, towards the house. John, not now afraid of the staring boys, looked towards the corner to see if his father was yet in sight.

Upstairs, they hushed Roy's crying. They bathed the blood away, to find, just above the left eyebrow, the jagged, superficial scar. "Lord, have mercy," murmured Elizabeth, "another inch and it would've been his eye." And she looked with apprehension towards the clock.

"Ain't it the truth," said Sister McCandless, busy with bandages and iodine.

"When did he go downstairs?" his mother asked at last.

Sister McCandless now sat fanning herself in the easy chair, at the head of the sofa where Roy lay, bound and silent. She paused for a moment to look sharply at John. John stood near the window, holding the newspaper advertisement and the drawing he had done.

"We was sitting on the fire-escape," he said. "Some boys he knew called him."

"When?"

"He said he'd be back in five minutes."

"Why didn't you tell me he was downstairs?"

He looked at his hands, clasping his notebook, and did not answer.

"Boy," said Sister McCandless, "you hear your mother a-talking to you?"

He looked at his mother. He repeated: "He said he'd be back in five minutes."

"He said he'd be back in five minutes," said Sister McCandless with scorn, "don't look to me like that's no right answer. You's the man of the house, you supposed to look after your baby brothers and sisters—you ain't supposed to let them run off and get half-killed. But I expect," she added, rising from the chair, dropping the cardboard fan, "your Daddy'll make you tell the truth. Your Ma's way too soft."

He did not look at her, but at the fan where it lay in the dark red, depressed seat where she had been. The fan advertised a pomade for their hair and showed a brown woman and her baby, both with glistening hair, smiling happily at each other.

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"Honey," said Sister McCandless, "I got to be moving along. Maybe I drop in later tonight. I don't reckon you going to be at Tarry Service tonight?"

Tarry Service was the prayer meeting held every Saturday night at church to strengthen believers and prepare the church for the coming of the Holy Ghost on Sunday.

"I don't reckon," said Elizabeth. She stood up; she and Sister McCandless kissed each other on the cheek. "But you be sure to remember me in your prayers."

"I surely will do that." She paused, with her hand on the door knob, and looked down at Roy and laughed. "Poor, little man," she said, "reckon he'll be content to sit on the fire-escape *now*."

Elizabeth laughed with her. "It sure ought to be a lesson to him. You don't reckon," she asked nervously, still smiling, "he going to keep that scar, do you?"

"Lord, no," said Sister McCandless, "ain't nothing but a scratch. I declare, Sister Grimes, you worse than a child. Another couple of weeks and you won't be able to *see* no scar. No, you go on about your housework, honey, and thank the Lord it weren't no worse." She opened the door; they heard the sound of feet on the stairs. "I expect that's the Reverend," said Sister McCandless, placidly, "I *bet* he going to raise Cain."

"Maybe it's Florence," Elizabeth said. "Sometimes she get here about this time." They stood in the doorway, staring, while the steps reached the landing below and began again climbing to their floor. "No," said Elizabeth then, "that ain't her walk. That's Gabriel."

"Well, I'll just go on," said Sister McCandless, "and kind of prepare his mind." She pressed Elizabeth's hand as she spoke and started into the hall, leaving the door behind her slightly ajar. Elizabeth turned slowly back into the room. Roy did not open his eyes, or move; but she knew that he was not sleeping; he wished to delay until the last possible moment any contact with his father. John put his newspaper and his notebook on the table and stood, leaning on the table, staring at her.

"It wasn't my fault," he said. "I couldn't stop him from going downstairs."

"No," she said, "you ain't got nothing to worry about. You just tell your daddy the truth."

He looked directly at her, and she turned to the window, staring into the street. What was Sister McCandless saying?

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Then from her bedroom she heard Delilah's thin wail—and she turned, still frowning, looking towards the bedroom and towards the still open door. She knew that John was watching her. Delilah continued to wail. She thought, angrily, *Now that girl's getting too big for that,* but she feared that Delilah would awaken Paul and she hurried into the bedroom. She tried to soothe Delilah back to sleep. Then she heard the front door open and close—too loud. Delilah raised her voice: with an exasperated sigh she picked the child up. Her child and Gabriel's, her children and Gabriel's: Roy, Delilah, Paul. Only John was nameless and a stranger: living, unalterable testimony to his mother's days of sin.

"What happened?" Gabriel demanded. He stood, enormous, in the centre of the room, his black lunch-box dangling from his hand, staring at the sofa where Roy lay.

John stood just before him, it seemed to her astonished vision just below him, beneath his fist, his heavy shoe. The child stared at the man in fascination and terror. When a girl down home she had seen rabbits stand so, paralysed before the barking dog.

She hurried past Gabriel to the sofa, feeling the weight of Delilah in her arms like the weight of a shield, and stood over Roy, saying: "Now, ain't a thing to get upset about, Gabriel. This boy sneaked downstairs while I had my back turned and got hisself hurt a little. He's all right now."

Roy, as though in confirmation, now opened his eyes.

Gabriel dropped his lunch-box with a clatter and knelt by the sofa. "How do you feel, son? Tell your daddy what happened?"

Roy opened his mouth to speak and then, relapsing into panic, began to cry. His father held him by the shoulder.

"You don't want to cry. You's Daddy's little man. Tell your daddy what happened."

"He went downstairs," said Elizabeth, "where he didn't have no business to be, and got to fighting with them bad boys playing on that rockpile. That's what happened and it's a mercy it weren't nothing worse."

He looked up at her. "Can't you let this boy answer me for hisself?"

Ignoring this, she went on, more gently: "He got cut on the forehead, but it ain't nothing to worry about."

"You call a doctor? How you know it ain't nothing to worry about?"

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"Is you got money to be throwing away on doctors? No, I ain't called no doctor. Ain't nothing wrong with my eyes that I can't tell whether he's hurt bad or not. He got a fright more'n anything else, and you ought to pray God it teaches him a lesson."

"You got a lot to say *now*," he said, "but I'll have *me* something to say in a minute. I'll be wanting to know when this happened, what you was doing with your eyes *then*." He turned back to Roy, who had lain quietly sobbing, eyes open and body held rigid: and who now, at his father's touch, remembered the height, the sharp, sliding rock beneath his feet, the sun, the explosion of the sun, his plunge into darkness and his salty blood; and recoiled, beginning to scream, as his father touched his forehead. "Hold still, hold still," crooned his father, "hold still. Don't cry. Daddy ain't going to hurt you, he just wants to see this bandage, see what they've done to his little man." But Roy continued to scream and would not be still and Gabriel dared not lift the bandage for fear of hurting him more. And he looked at Elizabeth in fury: "Can't you put that child down and help me with this boy? John, take your baby sister from your mother—don't look like neither of you got good sense."

John took Delilah and sat down with her in the easy chair. His mother bent over Roy, and held him still, while his father, carefully—but still Roy screamed—lifted the bandage and stared at the wound. Roy's sobs began to lessen. Gabriel readjusted the bandage.

"You see," said Elizabeth, finally, "he ain't nowhere near dead."

"It sure ain't your fault that he ain't dead." He and Elizabeth considered each other for a moment in silence. "He came mighty close to losing an eye. Course, his eyes ain't as big as your'n, so I reckon you don't think it matters so much." At this her face hardened; he smiled. "Lord, have mercy," he said, "you think you ever going to learn to do right? Where was you when all this happened? Who let him go downstairs?"

"Ain't nobody let him go downstairs, he just went. He got a head just like his father, it got to be broken before it'll bow. I was in the kitchen."

"Where was Johnnie?"

"He was in here."

"Where?"

"He was on the fire-escape."

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"Didn't he know Roy was downstairs?"

"I reckon."

"What you mean, you reckon? He ain't got your big eyes for nothing, is he?" He looked over at John. "Boy, you see your brother go downstairs?"

"Gabriel, ain't no sense in trying to blame Johnnie. You know right well if you have trouble making Roy behave, he ain't going to listen to his brother. He don't hardly listen to me."

"How come you didn't tell your mother Roy was downstairs?"

John said nothing, staring at the blanket which covered Delilah.

"Boy, you hear me? You want me to take a strap to you?"

"No, you ain't," she said. "You ain't going to take no strap to this boy, not today you ain't. Ain't a soul to blame for Roy's lying up there now but you—you because you done spoiled him so that he thinks he can do just anything and get away with it. I'm here to tell you that ain't no way to raise a child. You don't pray to the Lord to help you do better than you been doing, you going to live to shed bitter tears that the Lord didn't take his soul today." And she was trembling.

She moved, unseeing, towards John and took Delilah from his arms. She looked back at Gabriel, who had risen, who stood near the sofa, staring at her. And she found in his face not fury alone, which would not have surprised her; but hatred so deep as to become insupportable in its lack of personality. His eyes were struck alive, unmoving, blind with malevolence—she felt, like the pull of the earth at her feet, his longing to witness her perdition. Again, as though it might be propitiation, she moved the child in her arms. And at this his eyes changed, he looked at Elizabeth, the mother of his children, the helpmeet given by the Lord. Then her eyes clouded; she moved to leave the room; her foot struck the lunch-box lying on the floor.

"John," she said, "pick up your father's lunch-box like a good boy."

She heard, behind her, his scrambling movement as he left the easy chair, the scrape and jangle of the lunch-box as he picked it up, bending his dark head near the toe of his father's heavy shoe.

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VICTORIA GLYN

THEY'RE ALL AGAINST ME

You are now about to enter a bizarre world that has something in common with, for example, the plays of Harold Pinter. A recognisable, chuckling nightmare world that picks up a feeling everyone has known and carries it through to its splintering ultimate. It is created by a very young writer with a very famous name. Victoria Glyn is 14, and a direct descendant of Elinor Glyn. This is Victoria's first story and is presented just as she wrote it, spelling and all

I WALKED slowly home from the warehouse feeling rather sick. I thought about the unpleasant row I had just had. "Well if that's the way they want it, that's the way they'll get it. I do all the work and I get all the blame." I put my hands in my pocket and found that all my money had gone through the hole. Well that's the end. I'll ask the wife to mend it but she'll be to busy doing nothing. What's the good of a wife like that? Does no work, earns no money and is always cross when I come in. I felt worn out and everything had gone wrong this week. In the bus everyone had a totally blank expression. I wondered if they had all had a row and were going home to another. Did I also have a blank expression?

I stood nervously outside the front door and turned the key as quietly as I could, hoping I could slip in and get something without the wife noticing. I opened the door very slowly and crept in. I tiptoed down to the kitchen and closed the door. I heared a step on the stairs so I quickly grabbed the remains

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of a pie and ran to the window, flung it open and threw myself at the tool shed. I knew this routine too well. Then the scramble to get on to the roof—the gutter was already broken. I heared the kitchen window open, but I was already on the roof. I climbed on to the wall, my coat had caught on a nail so I took it off. I jumped down the other side.

"Where are you Danny. You've left your coat behind. You said you'd taken Mrs. Browning's umbrella round to her but—" The sound of her vouice was aweful to me and I ran on.

I went into the bar and ate my pie with a pint of beer. I had had no dinner. My heart sank when I saw Ted coming towards me. He sat down beside me.

"You're looking in the dumps tonight," he said. I stared hard at my feet and didn't answer. "You're just no good at anything and you just don't get on with anyone. You just got to take it from me. I'm sometimes your freind but more often not. It's just no good getting all het up about everything or you'll just never stop."

After more of this he went away and I still hadn't said anything. The barman asked me for my bill. I said I hadn't got my money on me—"I'll pay tomorrow." I made a mental note of not coming tomorrow. On the way home I saw a blind man holding out a hat. I put a piece of silver paper carefully into it.

When I got home my wife said, "So sorry you're late. Did you have to go back or something? I've tidied your drawers for you, but there was so much rubbish there that I threw most of it away."

I thought Why has she always got to row me? I went upstairs and opened my drawers, they were all empty except three. All my personal papers had been thrown away. I stormed out to the telephone box and found Jane hugging the telephone. "He said 'All my love,'" she said, and kissed the reciever.

My wife said, "One of the kids has had the pie, so there's no dinner tomorrow. Here's your coat you left on the shed. I've mended the pocket."

I said I would see who had taken the pie. I took the coat upstairs and elaborately cut a hole in both pockets. She's in a hellish bait tonight. Been going on at me about the money ever since I came in. I felt very tired and slumped on to the bed.

Next morning I was feeling in a very sunny mood. I made

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some early morning tea and then crouched outside our room and waited. When she came out I threw the cup of cold tea in her face and she went straight in again. I then locked the door and went out.

Everyone at the warehouse seamed crosser than usual. I had a row with the window cleaner each time I saw him. It was a half day and I went to the gardens and tried to cheer myself up again. I had borrowed some money off a freind, but I knew that it would all be gone as soon as my wife found out.

On the way home I met Ted. He said, "You're going to wear those shoes out pretty soon if you go on kicking that stone. You know you're just not the type to do well in your job. But you mustn't give it up. You've just got to keep on all the time and you'll just go on getting in everyone's bad books."

I went straight home and wrote a letter resigning from my job. After I had done it I realised that of course now there would not be enough money to satisfy my wife. I tried to borrow some off a freind, but he said he was saving up for a holiday. I thought gleefully how cross everyone would be now that I hadn't got a job. I imagined what Ted would say. I wondered if I could make Jane work. If she was in love she was old enough to earn a living for her family. I decided not to tell my wife.

It was the end of a week and I went to collect my wages. They hadn't received my resignation yet. The window cleaner was still there and I set a trap for him. I put a broken box full of bottles under the window. When he stood on it he went through and broke all the unused bottles inside. I didn't really get any pleasure out of this, and went home in a bait as usual.

On the bus there was no seat so I had to stand. It just wasn't fair. The boy next me was trying to do his homework, and every time the bus jogged his pen ran so I jogged him as much as I could. Suddenly I hated everyone in the bus and got off. I was nowhere near home, but I walked the rest of the way because I hated everyone. I stopped at a bar and had a drink. A small boy was crying so I gave him some beer which he spat out.

When I at last got home I told Jane what I had thought. "Get a job for goodness sake, or do you want us all to starve?" She said that she already had a job where her boyfreind worked, and she wasn't going to give us all her

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savings because she liked going to the cinema. She said it wasn't enough to stop us starving anyway. "Well that's that." I thought how selfish everyone was. I went down to the kitchen and braced myself for the row. 1...2...3...I went in, the room was empty. I thought I would show them that I wasn't selfish, so I made tea for my family. After half an hour I went up to hear the news. On the stairs I met the wife.

She said, "Eric hurt himself at school today and Cathy's been sick. You look tired, have you had tea? We all had it hours ago."

I bellowed, "Well I didn't get any wages this week so it's no good going on at me for it."

"Don't shout at me like that, Danny. I'm not deaf yet. I only ask for money sometimes so that we can have a square meal. I'm sorry you didn't get your wages this week. Why don't you get on to them about it? You don't seam to be getting it lately."

I picked her up bodily and carried her to our room. Halfway up the stairs I calmed down, and saw one of the kids. I thought it wouldn't look very good so I put her down and kissed her.

I was then so annoyed with what I had done that I hit her rather harder than I meant and she fell and screamed.

I said hurriedly, "So sorry, that was clumsy of me." To myself I said, "We had this row yesterday, and we'll have it again tomorrow. There's just nothing to look forward to."

I went to the pub and saw Ted at the bar. I crept round the back of the counter on hands and knees, much to the surprise of others who could see me. I went to a corner where he couldn't see me and spent all my money on getting drunk.

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◆ Born in 1951, Victoria Glyn soon began to follow in the footsteps of her famous family. Her father Anthony and her sister Caroline are both novelists; so, of course, was her distinguished great-grandmother. Victoria doesn't believe in wasting time. She began her own literary career at the age of five—and won a prize. At the moment she wants to be an interior designer, because it's different from the rest of the family. But then, as she herself readily admits, "You never know!"

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GRAHAM GREENE

Prompted by many readers' requests, Argosy chooses another powerful tale by the master story-teller

A CHANCE FOR MR. LEVER

MR. LEVER knocked his head against the ceiling and swore. Rice was stored above, and in the dark the rats began to move. Grains of rice fell between the slats on to his Revelation suitcase, his bald head, his cases of tinned food, the little square box in which he kept his medicines. His boy had already set up the camp bed and mosquito net and, outside in the warm damp dark, his folding table and chair. The thatched pointed huts streamed away towards the forest and a woman went from hut to hut carrying fire. The glow lit her old face, her sagging breasts, her tattooed, diseased body.

It was incredible to Mr. Lever that five weeks ago he had been in London.

He couldn't stand upright; he went down on hands and knees in the dust and opened his suitcase. He took out his wife's photograph and stood it on the chop box; he took out a writing pad and an indelible pencil: the pencil had softened in the heat and left mauve stains on his pyjamas. Then, because the light of the hurricane lamp disclosed cockroaches the size of black-beetles flattened against the mud wall, he carefully closed the suitcase. Already in ten days he had learned that they'd eat anything, socks, shirts, the laces out of your shoes.

Mr. Lever went outside; moths beat against his lamp; but

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there were no mosquitoes; he hadn't seen or heard one since he landed. He sat in a circle of light carefully observed. The blacks squatted outside their huts and watched him; they were friendly, interested, amused, but their strict attention irritated Mr. Lever. He could feel the small waves of interest washing round him, when he began to write, when he stopped writing, when he wiped his damp hands with a handkerchief. He couldn't touch his pocket without a craning of necks.

Dearest Emily, he wrote, *I've really started now. I'll send this letter back with a carrier when I've located Davidson. I'm very well. Of course everything's a bit strange. Look after yourself, my dear, and don't worry.*

"Massa, buy chicken," his cook said, appearing suddenly between the huts. A small stringy fowl struggled in his hands.

"Well," Mr. Lever said, "I gave you a shilling, didn't I?"

"They no like," the cook said. "These low bush people."

"Why don't they like? It's good money."

"They want king's money," the cook said, handing back the Victorian shilling. Mr. Lever had to get up, go back into his hut, grope for his money box, search through twenty pounds of small change: there was no peace.

He had learned that very quickly. He had to economise (the whole trip was a gamble which scared him); he couldn't afford hammock carriers. He would arrive, tired out after seven hours of walking, at a village of which he didn't know the name and not for a minute could he sit quietly and rest. He must shake hands with the chief, he must see about a hut, accept presents of palm wine he was afraid to drink, buy rice and palm oil for the carriers, give them salts and aspirin, paint their sores with iodine. They never left him alone for five minutes on end until he went to bed. And then the rats began, rushing down the walls like water when he put out the light, gambolling among his cases.

I'm too old, Mr. Lever told himself, I'm too old, writing damply, indelibly, *I hope to find Davidson tomorrow. If I do, I may be back almost as soon as this letter. Don't economise on the stout and milk, dear, and call in the doctor if you feel bad. I've got a premonition this trip's going to turn out well. We'll take a holiday, you need a holiday;* and staring ahead past the huts and the black faces and the banana trees towards the forest from which he would come, into which he would sink again next day, he thought, Eastbourne. Eastbourne would do her a world of good, and continued to write the only kind of lies he'd ever told Emily, the lies which comforted.

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I ought to draw at least three hundred in commission and my expenses. But it wasn't the sort of place he'd been accustomed to sell heavy machinery in; thirty years of it, up and down Europe and in the States, but never anything like this. He could hear his filter dripping in the hut, and somewhere somebody was playing something (he was so lost he hadn't got the simplest terms to his hand), something monotonous, melancholy, superficial, a twanging of palm fibres which seemed to convey that you weren't happy, but it didn't matter much, everything would always be the same.

Look after yourself, Emily, he repeated. It was almost the only thing he found himself capable of writing to her; he couldn't describe the narrow steep lost paths, the snakes sizzling away like flames, the rats, the dust, the naked, diseased bodies. He was unbearably tired of nakedness. *Don't forget*... It was like living with a lot of cows.

"The chief," his boy whispered, and between the huts under a waving torch came an old stout man wearing a robe of native cloth and a battered bowler hat. Behind him his men carried six bowls of rice, a bowl of palm oil, two bowls of broken meat. "Chop for the labourers," the boy explained, and Mr. Lever had to get up and smile and nod and try to convey without words that he was pleased, that the chop was excellent, that the chief would get a good dash in the morning. At first the smell had been almost too much for Mr. Lever.

"Ask him," he said to his boy, "if he's seen a white man come through here lately. Ask him if a white man's been digging around here. Damn it," Mr. Lever burst out, the sweat breaking on the backs of his hands and on his bald head, "ask him if he's seen Davidson."

"Davidson?"

"Oh hell," Mr. Lever said, "you know what I mean. The white man I'm looking for."

"White man?"

"What do you imagine I'm here for, eh? White man? Of course white man. I'm not here for my health." A cow coughed, rubbed its horns against the hut, and two goats broke through between the chief and him, upsetting the bowls of meat scraps; nobody cared, they picked the meat out of the dust and dung.

Mr. Lever sat down and put his hands over his face—fat white well-cared-for hands with wrinkles of flesh over the rings: *I'm too old for this.*

"Chief say no white man been here long time."

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"How long?"

"Chief say not since he pay hut tax."

"How long's that?"

"Long, long time."

"Ask him how far is it to Greh tomorrow."

"Chief say too far."

"Nonsense," Mr. Lever said.

"Chief say too far. Better stay here. Fine town. No humbug."

Mr. Lever groaned. Every evening there was the same trouble. The next town was always too far. They would invent any excuse to delay him, to give themselves a rest.

"Ask the chief how many hours—?"

"Plenty, plenty." They had no idea of time. "This fine chief. Fine chop. Labourers tired. No humbug."

"We are going on," Mr. Lever said.

He thought: if this wasn't the last chance, I'd give up. They nagged him so, and suddenly he longed for another white man (not Davidson, he daren't say anything to Davidson) to whom he could explain the desperation of his lot. It wasn't fair, that a man after thirty years' commercial travelling should need to go from door to door asking for a job. He had been a good traveller, he had made money for many people, his references were excellent, but the world had moved on since his day. He wasn't streamlined; he certainly wasn't streamlined. He had been ten years' retired when he lost his money.

Mr. Lever walked up and down Victoria Street showing his references. Many of the men knew him, gave him cigars, laughed at him in a friendly way for wanting to take on a job at his age ("I can't somehow settle at home. The old warhorse you know..."), cracked a joke or two in the passage, went back that night to Maidenhead silent in the first class carriage, shut in with age and ruin and how bad things were and poor devil his wife's probably sick.

It was in the rather shabby little office off Leadenhall Street that Mr. Lever met his chance. It called itself an engineering firm, but there were only two rooms, a typewriter, a girl with gold teeth and Mr. Lucas, a thin narrow man with a tic in one eyelid. All through the interview the eyelid flickered at Mr. Lever. Mr. Lever had never before fallen so low as this.

But Mr. Lucas struck him as reasonably honest. He put "all his cards on the table." He hadn't got any money, but he had expectations, he had the handling of a patent. It was

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a new crusher. There was money in it. But you couldn't expect the big trusts to change over their machinery now. Things were too bad. You'd got to get in at the start, and that was where—why, that was where this chief, the bowls of chop, the nagging and the rats and the heat, came in. They called themselves a republic, Mr. Lucas said, he didn't know anything about that, they were not as black as they were painted, he supposed (ha ha, nervously ha ha); anyway this company had slipped agents over the border and grabbed a concession: gold and diamonds. He could tell Mr. Lever in confidence that the trust was frightened of what they'd found. Now an enterprising man could just slip across (Mr. Lucas liked the word slip, it made everything sound easy and secret) and introduce this new crusher to them: it would save them thousands when they started work, there'd be a fat commission, and afterwards, with the start... There was a fortune for them all.

"But can't you fix it up in Europe?"

Tic, tic went Mr. Lucas' eyelid. "A lot of Belgians; they are leaving all decisions to the man on the spot. An Englishman called Davidson."

"How about expenses?"

"That's the trouble," Mr. Lucas said. "We are only beginning. What we want is a partner. We can't afford to send a man. But if you like a gamble... Twenty per cent commission..."

"Chief says excuse him." The carriers squatted round the basins and scooped up the rice in their left hands. "Of course. Of course," Mr. Lever said absent-mindedly. "Very kind, I'm sure." He was back out of the dust and dark, away from the stink of goats and palm oil and whelping bitches, back among the Rotarians and lunch at Stone's, "the pint of old," and the trade papers; he was a good fellow again finding his way back to Golders Green just a little lit; his masonic emblem rattled on his watch chain; and he bore with him from the tube station to his house in Finchley Road a sense of companionship, of broad stories and belches, a sense of bravery.

He needed all his bravery now; the last of his savings had gone into the trip. After thirty years he knew a good thing when he saw it, and he had no doubts about the new crusher. What he doubted was his ability to find Davidson. For one thing there weren't any maps; the way you travelled in the Republic was to write down a list of names and trust that

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someone in the villages you passed would understand and know the route. But they always said, "Too far." Good fellowship wilted before the phrase.

"Quinine," Mr. Lever said. "Where's my quinine?" His boy never remembered a thing; they just didn't care what happened to you; their smiles meant nothing, and Mr. Lever, who knew better than anyone the value of a meaningless smile in business, resented their heartlessness, turned towards the dilatory boy an expression of disappointment and dislike.

"Chief say white man in bush five hours away."

"That's better," Mr. Lever said. "It must be Davidson. He's digging for gold?"

"Ya. White man dig for gold in bush."

"We'll be off early tomorrow," Mr. Lever said.

"Chief say better stop this town. Fever humbug white man."

"Too bad," Mr. Lever said, and he thought with pleasure: my luck's changed. He'll want help. He won't refuse me a thing. A friend in need is a friend indeed, and his heart warmed towards Davidson, seeing himself arrive like an answer to prayer out of the forest, feeling quite biblical and *vox humana*. He thought: Prayer. I'll pray tonight, that's the kind of thing a fellow gives up, but it pays, there's something in it, remembering the long agonising prayer on his knees, by the sideboard, under the decanters, when Emily went to hospital.

"Chief say white man dead."

Mr. Lever turned his back on them and went into his hut. His sleeve nearly overturned the hurricane lamp. He undressed quickly, stuffing his clothes into a suitcase away from the cockroaches. He wouldn't believe what he had been told; it wouldn't pay him to believe. If Davidson was dead, there was nothing he could do but return; he had spent more than he could afford; he would be a ruined man. He supposed that Emily might find a home with her brother, but he could hardly expect her brother— He began to cry, but you couldn't have told in the shadowy hut the difference between sweat and tears. He knelt down beside his camp bed and mosquito net and prayed on the dust of the earth floor. Up till now he had always been careful never to touch a floor with his naked feet for fear of jiggers; there were jiggers everywhere, they only waited an opportunity to dig themselves in under the toe nails, lay their eggs and multiply.

"O God," Mr. Lever prayed, "don't let Davidson be dead;

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let him be just sick and glad to see me." He couldn't bear the idea that he might not any longer be able to support Emily. "O God, there's nothing I wouldn't do." But that was still an empty phrase; he had no real notion yet of what he would do for Emily. They had been happy together for thirty-five years; he had never been more than momentarily unfaithful to her when he was lit after a Rotarian dinner and egged on by the boys; whatever skirt he'd been with in his time he had never for a moment imagined that he could be happy married to anyone else. It wasn't fair if, just when you were old and needed each other most, you lost your money and couldn't keep together.

But of course Davidson wasn't dead. What would he have died of? The blacks were friendly. People said the country was unhealthy, but he hadn't so much as heard a mosquito. Besides you didn't die of malaria; you just lay between the blankets and took quinine and felt like death and sweated it out of you. There was dysentery, but Davidson was an old campaigner; you were safe if you boiled and filtered the water. The water was poison even to the touch; it was unsafe to wet your feet because of guinea worm, but you didn't die of guinea worm.

Mr. Lever lay in bed and his thoughts went round and round and he couldn't sleep. He thought: you don't die of a thing like guinea worm. It makes a sore on your foot, and if you put your foot in water you can see the eggs dropping out. You have to find the end of the worm, like a thread of cotton, and wind it round a match and wind it out of your leg without breaking; it stretches as high as the knee. I'm too old for this country, Mr. Lever thought.

Then his boy was beside him again. He whispered urgently to Mr. Lever through the mosquito net, "Massa, the labourers say they go home."

"Go home?" Mr. Lever said wearily; he had heard it so often before. "Why do they want to go home? What is it now?" but he didn't really want to hear the latest squabble: that the Bande men were never sent to carry water because the headman was a Bande, that someone had stolen an empty treacle tin and sold it in the village, that someone wasn't made to carry a proper load, that the next day's journey was "too far." He said, "Tell 'em they can go home. I'll pay them off in the morning. But they won't get any dash. They'd have got a good dash if they'd stayed." He was certain it was just another try-on; he wasn't as green as all that.

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"Yes, massa. They no want dash."

"What's that?"

"They frightened fever humbug them like white man."

"I'll get carriers in the village. They can go home."

"Me too, massa."

"Get out," Mr. Lever said; it was the last straw; "get out and let me sleep." The boy went at once, obedient even if he was a deserter, and Mr. Lever thought: sleep, what a hope. He lifted the net and got out of bed (barefooted again: he didn't care a damn about the jiggers) and searched for his medicine box. It was locked, of course, and he had to open his suitcase and find the key in a trouser pocket. His nerves were more on edge than ever by the time he found the sleeping tablets and he took three of them. That made him sleep, heavily and dreamlessly, though when he woke he found that something had made him fling out his arm and open the net. If there had been a single mosquito in the place, he'd have been bitten, but of course there wasn't one.

He could tell at once that the trouble hadn't blown over. The village—he didn't know its name—was perched on a hill-top; east and west the forest flowed out beneath the little plateau: to the west it was a dark unfeatured mass like water, but in the east you could already discern the unevennesses, the great grey cotton trees lifted above the palms. Mr. Lever was always called before dawn, but no-one had called him. A few of his carriers sat outside a hut sullenly talking; his boy was with them. Mr. Lever went back inside and dressed; he thought all the time, I must be firm, but he was scared, scared of being deserted, scared of being made to return.

When he came outside again the village was awake: the women were going down the hill to fetch water, winding silently past the carriers, past the flat stones where the chiefs were buried, the little grove of trees where the rice birds, like green and yellow canaries nested. Mr. Lever sat down on his folding chair among the chickens and whelping bitches and cow dung and called his boy. He took "a strong line"; but he didn't know what was going to happen. "Tell the chief I want to speak to him," he said.

There was some delay; the chief wasn't up yet, but presently he appeared in his blue and white robe, setting his bowler hat straight. "Tell him," Mr. Lever said, "I want carriers to take me to the white man and back. Two days."

"Chief no agree," the boy said.

Mr. Lever said furiously, "Damn it, if he doesn't agree, he

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won't get any dash from me, not a penny." It occurred to him immediately afterwards how hopelessly dependent he was on these people's honesty. There in the hut for all to see was his money box; they had only to take it. This wasn't a British or French colony; the blacks on the coast wouldn't bother, could do nothing if they did bother, because a stray Englishman had been robbed in the interior.

"Chief say how many?"

"It's only for two days," Mr. Lever said. "I can do with six."

"Chief say how much?"

"Sixpence a day and chop."

"Chief no agree."

"Ninepence a day then."

"Chief say too far. A shilling."

"All right, all right," Mr. Lever said, "a shilling then. You others can go home if you want to. I'll pay you off now, but you won't get any dash, not a penny."

He had never really expected to be left, and it gave him a sad feeling of loneliness to watch them move sullenly away (they were ashamed of themselves) down the hill to the west. They hadn't any loads, but they weren't singing; they dropped silently out of sight. his boy with them, and he was alone with his pile of boxes and the chief who couldn't talk a word of English. Mr. Lever smiled tremulously.

It was ten o'clock before his new carriers were chosen; he could tell that none of them wanted to go; and they would have to walk through the heat of the middle day if they were to find Davidson before it was dark. He hoped the chief had explained properly where they were going; he couldn't tell; he was completely shut off from them, and when they started down the eastward slope, he might just as well have been alone.

They were immediately caught up in the forest. Forest conveys a sense of wildness and beauty, of an active natural force, but this Liberian forest was simply a dull green wilderness. You passed, on a path a foot or so wide, through an endless back garden of tangled weeds; it didn't seem to be growing round you, so much as dying. There was no life at all, except for a few large birds whose wings creaked overhead through the invisible sky like an unoiled door. There was no view, no way out for the eyes, no change of scene. It wasn't the heat that tired so much as the boredom; you had to think of things to think about; but even Emily failed to fill the

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mind for more than three minutes at a time. It was a relief, a distraction, when the path was flooded and Mr. Lever had to be carried on a man's back. At first he had disliked the strong bitter smell (it reminded him of a breakfast food he was made to eat as a child), but he soon got over that. Now he was unaware that they smelled at all; any more than he was aware that the great swallow-tailed butterflies, which clustered at the water's edge and rose in green clouds round his waist, were beautiful. His senses were dulled and registered very little except his boredom.

But they did register a distinct feeling of relief when his leading carrier pointed to a rectangular hole dug just off the path. Mr. Lever understood. Davidson had come this way. He stopped and looked at it. It was like a grave dug for a small man, but it went down deeper than graves usually do. About twelve feet below there was black water, and a few wooden props which held the sides from slipping were beginning to rot; the whole must have been dug since the rains. It didn't seem enough, that hole, to have brought out Mr. Lever with his plans and estimates for a new crusher. He was used to big industrial concerns, the sight of pit heads, the smoke of chimneys, the dingy rows of cottages back to back, the leather armchair in the office, the good cigar, the masonic handgrips, and again it seemed to him, as it had seemed in Mr. Lucas' office, that he had fallen very low. It was as if he was expected to do business beside a hole a child had dug in an over-grown and abandoned back garden; percentages wilted in the hot damp air. He shook his head; he mustn't be discouraged; this was an old hole. Davidson had probably done better since. It was only common sense to suppose that the gold rift which was mined at one end in Nigeria, at the other in Sierra Leone, should pass through the Republic. Even the biggest mines had to begin with a hole in the ground. The company, he had talked to the directors in Brussels, were quite confident; all they wanted was the approval of the man on the spot that the crusher was suitable for local conditions. A signature, that was all he had to get, he told himself, staring down into the puddle of black water.

Five hours, the chief had said, but after six hours they were still walking. Mr. Lever had eaten nothing; he wanted to get to Davidson first. All through the heat of the day he walked. The forest protected him from the direct sun, but it shut out the air, and the occasional clearings, shrivelled though they were in the vertical glare, seemed cooler than the

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shade because there was a little more air to breathe. At four o'clock the heat diminished, but he began to fear they wouldn't reach Davidson before dark. His foot pained him; he had caught a jigger the night before; it was as if someone held a lighted match to his toe. At five they came on a dead black.

Another rectangular hole in a small cleared space among the dusty greenery caught Mr. Lever's eye. He peered down and was shocked to see a face return his stare, white eyeballs like phosphorus in the black water. The black had been bent almost double to fit him in; the hole was really too small to be a grave, and he had swollen. His flesh was like a blister you could prick with a needle. Mr. Lever felt sick and tired; he might have been tempted to return if he could have reached the village before dark; but now there was nothing to do but go on; the carriers luckily hadn't seen the body. He waved them forward and stumbled after among the roots, fighting his nausea. He fanned himself with his sun helmet; his wide fat face was damp and pale. He had never seen an uncared-for body before; his parents he had seen carefully laid out with closed eyes and washed faces; they "fell asleep" quite in accordance with their epitaphs, but you couldn't think of sleep in connection with the white eyeballs and the swollen face. Mr. Lever would have liked very much to say a prayer, but prayers were out of place in the dead drab forest; they simply didn't "come."

With the dusk a little life did waken: something lived in the dry weeds and brittle trees, if only monkeys. They chattered and screamed all round you, but it was too dark to see them; you were like a blind man in the centre of a frightened crowd who wouldn't say what scared them. The carriers too were frightened. They ran under their fifty-pound loads behind the dipping light of the hurricane lamp, their huge flat carriers' feet flapping in the dust like empty gloves. Mr. Lever listened nervously for mosquitoes; you would have expected them to be out by now, but he didn't hear one.

Then, at the top of a rise above a small stream, they came on Davidson. The ground had been cleared in a square of twelve feet and a small tent pitched; he had dug another hole; the scene came dimly into view as they climbed the path: the chop boxes piled outside the tent, the siphon of soda water, the filter, an enamel basin. But there wasn't a light, there wasn't a sound, the flaps of the tent were not closed, and Mr. Lever had to face the possibility that after all the chief might have told the truth.

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Mr. Lever took the lamp and stooped inside the tent. There was a body on the bed. At first Mr. Lever thought Davidson was covered with blood, but then he realised it was a black vomit which stained his shirts and khaki shorts, the fair stubble on his chin. He put out a hand and touched Davidson's face, and if he hadn't felt a slight breath on his palm he would have taken him for dead; his skin was so cold. He moved the lamp closer, and now the lemon-yellow face told him all he wanted to know: he hadn't thought of that when his boy said fever. It was quite true that a man didn't die of malaria, but an old piece of news read in New York in '98 came back to mind: there had been an outbreak in Rio and ninety-four per cent of the cases had been fatal. It hadn't meant anything to him then, but it did now. As he watched, Davidson was sick effortlessly; like a tap out of which something flowed.

It seemed at first to Mr. Lever to be the end of everything—of his journey, his hopes, his life with Emily. There was nothing he could do for Davidson, the man was unconscious, there were times when his pulse was so low and irregular that Mr. Lever thought that he was dead until another black stream spread from his mouth; it was no use even cleaning him. Mr. Lever laid his own blankets over the bed on top of Davidson's because he was so cold to the touch, but he had no idea whether he was doing the right, or even the fatally wrong, thing. The chance of survival, if there was any chance at all, depended on neither of them. Outside, his carriers had built a fire and were cooking the rice they had brought with them. Mr. Lever opened his folding chair and sat by the bed. He wanted to keep awake: it seemed right to keep awake; he opened his case and found his unfinished letter to Emily. He sat by Davidson's side and tried to write, but he could think of nothing but what he had already written too often: *Look after yourself; don't forget the stout and milk.*

He fell asleep over his pad and woke at two and thought that Davidson was dead. But he was wrong again. He was very thirsty and missed his boy. Always the first thing his boy did at the end of a march was to light a fire and put on a kettle; after that, by the time his table and chair were set up, there was water ready for the filter. Mr. Lever found half a cup of soda water left in Davidson's siphon; if it had been only his health at stake he would have gone down to the stream and drank, but he had Emily to remember.

There was a typewriter by the bed and it occurred to Mr. Lever that he might just as well begin to write his report of

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failure now; it might keep him awake; it seemed disrespectful to the dying man to sleep. He found paper under some letters which had been typed and signed but not sealed. Davidson must have been taken ill very suddenly; Mr. Lever wondered whether it was he who had crammed the black into the hole; his boy perhaps, for there was no sign of a servant. He balanced the typewriter on his knee and headed the letter, *In Camp near Greh.*

It seemed to him unfair that he should have come so far, spent so much money, worn out a rather old body to meet his inevitable ruin in a dark tent beside a dying man when he could have met it just as well at home with Emily in the plush parlour. The thought of the prayers he had uselessly uttered on his knees by the camp bed among the jiggers, the rats and the cockroaches made him rebellious. A mosquito, the first he had heard, went humming round the tent. He slashed at it savagely; he wouldn't have recognised himself among the Rotarians. He was lost and he was set free. Moralities were what enabled a man to live happily and successfully with his fellows, but Mr. Lever wasn't happy and he wasn't successful, and his only fellow in the little stuffy tent wouldn't be troubled by Untruth in Advertising or by Mr. Lever coveting his neighbour's oxen. You couldn't keep your ideas intact when you discovered their geographical nature. The Solemnity of Death: death wasn't solemn; it was a lemon-yellow skin and a black vomit. Honesty is the Best Policy: that, he saw quite suddenly, was palpably false. It was an anarchist who sat happily over the typewriter, an anarchist who recognised nothing but one personal relationship, his affection for Emily. Mr. Lever began to type: *I have examined the plans and estimates of the new Lucas crusher . . .*

Mr. Lever thought with savage happiness: I win. This letter would be the last the company would hear from Davidson. The junior partner would open it in the dapper Brussels office; he would tap his false teeth with a Waterman pen and go in to talk to M. Golz. *Taking all these factors into consideration I recommend acceptance . . .* They would telegraph to Lucas. As for Davidson, that trusted agent of the company would have died of yellow fever at some never accurately determined date. Another agent would come out, and the crusher . . . Mr. Lever carefully copied Davidson's signature on a spare sheet of paper. He wasn't satisfied. He turned the original upside down and copied it that way, so as not to be confused by his own idea of how a letter should be formed.

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That was better, but it didn't satisfy him. He searched until he found Davidson's own pen and began to copy and copy the signature. He fell asleep copying it and woke again an hour later to find the lamp was out; it had burnt up all the oil. He sat there beside Davidson's bed till daylight; once he was bitten by a mosquito in the ankle and clapped his hand to the place too late: the brute went humming out. With the light Mr. Lever saw that Davidson was dead. "Dear dear," he said. "Poor fellow." He spat out with the words, quite delicately in a corner, the bad morning taste in his mouth. It was like a little sediment of conventionality.

Mr. Lever got two of his carriers to cram Davidson tidily in his hole. He was no longer afraid—of them or of failure or of separation. He tore up his letter to Emily. It no longer represented his mood in its timidity, its secret fear, its gentle fussing phrases, "Don't forget the stout," "Look after yourself." He would be home as soon as the letter, and they were going to do things together now they'd never dreamed of doing. The money for the crusher was only the beginning. His ideas stretched further now than Eastbourne, they stretched as far as Switzerland; he had a feeling that if he really let himself go, they'd stretch as far as the Riviera. How happy he was on what he thought of as "the trip home." He was freed from what had held him back through a long pedantic career, the fear of some conscious fate that notes the dishonesty, notes the skirt in Piccadilly, notes the glass too many of Stone's special. Now he had said boo to that goose.

But you on the other hand who are reading this, who know so much more than Mr. Lever, who can follow the mosquito's progress from the dead swollen black to Davidson's tent, to Mr. Lever's ankle, you, I say, may possibly believe in fate, a kindly fate tender towards human frailty, ready to give Mr. Lever three days of happiness, three days off the galling chain, as he carried back through the forest his amateurish forgeries and the infection of yellow fever in the blood. The story may very well confirm your faith in that loving merciful omniscience if it has not been shaken by personal knowledge of the drab empty forest through which Mr. Lever now went so merrily, where it is impossible to believe in any spiritual life, in anything outside the nature dying round you, the shrivelling of the weeds. There are two opinions about everything; it was Mr. Lever's favourite expression, drinking beer in the Ruhr, Pernod in Lorraine, selling heavy machinery.

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I'M SURE
she said six-thirty

One of the hardest explanations to be found
Is an explanation for just standing around.
Anyone just standing around looks pretty sinister,
Even a minister;
Consider then the plight of the criminal,
Who lacks even the protective coloration of a hyminal,
And as just standing around is any good criminal's practically daily stint,
I wish to proffer a hint.
Are you, sir, a masher who blushes as he loiters,
Do you stammer to passers-by that you are merely expecting a streetcar, or a dispatch from Reuter's?
Or perhaps you are a safeblower engaged in casing a joint;
Can you look the patrolman in the eye or do you forget all the savoir-faire you ever loint?
Suppose you are a shoplifter awaiting an opportunity to lift a shop,
Or simply a novice with a length of lead pipe killing time in a dark alley pending the arrival of a wealthy fop,
Well, should any official ask you why you are just standing around,
Do you wish you could simply sink into the ground?
My dear sir, do not be embarrassed, do not reach for your gun or your knife,
Remember the password, which, uttered in a tone of quiet despair, is the explanation of anyone's standing around anywhere at any hour for any length of time:
"I'm waiting for my wife."

OGDEN NASH

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LALAGH'S LAST PARTY

By Victor Francis

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October 31st is Halloween, traditionally the time for an eerie story. Here is one in which chills are mixed with sophisticated chuckles

LALAGH FASTNET will not be giving a Halloween party this year. It is not altogether coincidence that just twelve months have passed since Lalagh last gave a party.

Up to October 31st, 1964, of course, Lalagh's name was rarely absent from the social columns of those newspapers and glossy magazines which record the hangover whirl of that group of people known to non-members as Society. Many have wondered what has happened to "London's leading hostess" (as her public relations consultant described her) since then. I am now in a position to reveal—since I have just had a letter from Lalagh—that, after a leisurely tour round the world, she has decided to settle in Mexico, where she has been surprised to find that the estate left by her fourth husband not only exists, but is congenial.

"And Vicky, darling," she writes in a phrase so familiar that I can almost hear her vodka voice, "out here I shall never, ever, have to give a party again."

That being so, I feel free to set down the events of Lalagh's last party.

The invitation card was expensively engraved with a broomstick and a reproduction of that Egyptian cat from the British Museum, and it announced that Lalagh invited witches and warlocks to a Halloween party starting at 9 p.m. on October 31st. Fancy dress would be worn.

Knowing the way of Lalagh's parties, I arrived two hours and several bottles of gin late. By that time, I thought, the preliminary politenesses would be over and a certain mellowness achieved. I was right. As I deposited my overcoat in the cloakroom I had to mutter a hasty "Excuse me" to an Irish peer who was being very Celtic with a sub-deb. I stepped through the usual fringe of Guardee sons and twittering girls on the wide staircase and made my way through the crowded drawing room with its famous indecent ceiling, and into the library.

The library is always the heart of Lalagh's parties. There, around the enormous open fireplace, congregate her intimates. The drinking is slower but more thorough in the library, because we know it will go on after the other guests have left; and reputations are roasted in a civilised leisure.

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The usual faces were there. A Scottish earl who looked like a grouse; a couple of Socialist MPs looking like millionaires and an impoverished-looking man who owned a fleet of oil-tankers; a professional Communist drinking champagne; a young writer trying to be switched on and an older literary critic trying to switch him off; an oleaginous Mittel-European with a phoney title and charming manners; a pastel-tinted interior decorator; and a gush of wives and model girls.

And Lalagh. Having got all her guests into fancy dress, Lalagh was wearing a most un-fancy gown by Balenciaga. She looked as though she had been poured into it with a slightly shaking hand, and it took me four drinks before I could have a word with her alone. "Well, what is it to be tonight?" I asked. "Ambassadors on broomsticks?"

"What do you mean, Vicky darling?"

"Every one of your parties has some horrid surprise. Personally, I believe this country is not in the Common Market solely on account of your 'Let's be European' party. And what have you fixed for Halloween?"

"Oh, you needn't worry," she laughed. "I thought we'd be very traditional tonight. The peasantry have nearly all gone now"—she nodded her tinted curls towards the drawing room—"and the library will settle down and drink Halloween punch and play the old traditional games."

"Such as?" I asked warily.

"Don't be so precise, Vicky darling. How would I know? I've got an entertainer coming—he's supposed to know all about these things—and he can be master of ceremonies."

"Master of a most remarkable range of ceremonies, dear lady," said a voice at my side. I turned to my left and then to my right to find the owner of the voice, and then I turned right round to find myself looking at an extraordinary figure.

His plumpness was accentuated by a flowing cloak so that he appeared almost spherical. His head was completely bald and shining, and his eyes were like two glowing specks of lava set in a dumpling. He was beaming. He gave a courtly bow towards Lalagh and produced a large visiting card. I took it and read aloud: "Mr. Beazle."

Suddenly the card seemed to be drawn from my fingers as if it were attached to a cord, and I saw he was tucking it back into a pocket.

"You are a conjurer?" I inquired.

"Yes, I do conjure," he said. "Especially for Halloween."

I glanced at Lalagh and saw that, for the first time in all the

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years I have known her, she had lost a little of her poise. Mr. Beazle took her right hand, bent low over it, and gently placed his lips against her wrist. Then he straightened and said: "If I may—a glass of punch, and then to our revelry." And he glided towards the punch bowl.

Lalagh stood transfixed, looking after him, and I noticed that she shivered. Then she raised her right arm and stared at her wrist. I followed her eyes. On the fair skin, purpled and livid, two small marks were appearing. They looked like the scar of a burn, and they were roughly in the shape of a man's lips.

Mr. Beazle was an immediate success. As he drank his punch, someone asked why he wasn't in fancy dress. "I am," he said, lighting a cigar with a small blue flame which appeared to come from his right thumb-nail. "*Voilà!*" and he dropped his cloak. We stood silently, for he revealed only a well-cut suit of tails in midnight blue.

"Well?" Lalagh asked.

He turned slowly on small feet. When his back was towards us we saw a tail, long and slender and ending in a sort of fork, curling down from his jacket.

"Brilliant," said Lalagh. "A tail for Halloween."

"How terribly taurine," said the interior decorator.

"Bloody ridiculous," said an MP.

Mr. Beazle taught us Halloween songs which, he said, he had learned in the Black Forest. He had us playing silly games which involved imaginary circles on the carpet. Then there was an awkward hiatus when he demanded a goat which, he said, he would transform into a warlock.

"But my dear man," said Lalagh, "you should have warned me if you wanted a goat. I can't possibly supply a goat at two in the morning in the middle of Westminster."

The rotund Mr. Beazle was cross. "It is inconceivable to celebrate Halloween without a warlock, and even I cannot conjure a warlock without a goat." And his tail began to swish in an extremely lifelike manner.

"Well, I'm sure you're an excellent conjurer. Why don't you just conjure us something else?" said the literary critic.

The others took up the cry. "Go on, show us some conjuring tricks." Mr. Beazle appeared to make an effort to control himself, and agreed to conjure.

The result may have been a professional triumph for him, but it was disastrous for the rest of us. He conjured an

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address book from the Mittel European's pocket and read some of the contents aloud. He pretended to thought-read the ship-owner, and the thoughts may not have been accurate, but they were highly embarrassing. He hypnotised the interior decorator and told him to imagine that all his inhibitions were gone.

I will say no more about that half-hour, except that it became progressively more frightful until Lalagh took Mr. Beazle firmly by the arm and led him back to the punch bowl, saying: "Now, dear man, I'm sure you've earned a rest. Just you have a quiet drink for a while."

We stood in a silent group, not meeting each other's eyes, and aware that on the other side of the room Mr. Beazle's tail was going *swish, swish* with rhythmic ferocity.

One of the girls broke the silence by suggesting with a false gaiety that we should play John Brown's Body. I remembered the game from my student days. It was a particularly stupid one, but anything was welcome to thaw the embarrassment of Mr. Beazle's disclosures.

I expect you know the game—a traditional Halloween one. The players sit in a circle with the lights out, and someone chants a rhyme about John Brown's body. Various ridiculous objects are passed round and everyone giggles a lot. For example, when the chant is of John Brown's head, a turnip might be passed round; for his fist, a glove, and so on.

We put the lights out and we played. The usual extraordinary array of objects went from hand to hand, and somebody must have raided Lalagh's refrigerator, because once I found myself passing a haddock, and something which I am sure was an uncooked joint of beef.

Then, in the darkness, I felt somebody push into the circle beside me and Mr. Beazle's voice said: "I am sure, ladies and gentlemen, you will not object if a professional joins your amateur pleasures."

His voice was compelling, taut with anger, and nobody replied. Then he went on: "Let us change the gender of this game. And let us speed it up. I will initiate!" The final three words rang round the room. "The lady's head!" he said; and a roundish object was deposited in my hands. With a shudder, I passed it to my other neighbour.

"The lady's torso!" And I staggered as a large object weighed upon me. It felt uncomfortably like a woman's body as I lurched it on. There was a grunt from beside me, and a scream from somewhere as one of the women was presented with the "head."

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"The lady's legs," pronounced Mr. Beazle's voice; but I thought this thing had gone far enough. There was a hubbub as I went to the light switch. Then I turned to face the room.

As eyes adjusted to the light, I saw Lalagh holding the "head." She looked down, gave a loud cry, and appeared about to faint.

The Scottish earl steadied her and murmured, "There, there, calm down. It's only a game."

"But it looks . . . real," Lalagh whispered.

It did. And so did the woman's torso on the carpet. And so did the two legs, separate, and awkwardly bent.

Then Mr. Beazle stood and he smiled, although I noticed there was still a twitch to his tail. "Please," he said. "Remember this is only a slight Halloween entertainment that you were all so keen to play in preference to *my* programme. Permit me, dear lady—" and he took the head from Lalagh. With his other hand he grabbed the torso from the floor. Then he appeared to screw the head on to its trunk. He followed the same procedure with the legs. The body was complete.

A general relieved sigh arose. "You see?" said the interior decorator. "It's only one of those wax dummies that they have in rather *passé* shops. That's all . . ."

Lalagh still looked shaken, and was staring fixedly into the molten eyes of Mr. Beazle. He walked across to her, the dummy tucked under an arm, and said clearly: "Dear lady, I am offended. I have come a long way for this Halloween night and I have been insulted. I shall not return. *Adieu!*" He turned to leave, then hesitated and said: "I have no further need of this toy."

With a great heave, he tossed the dummy into the open fireplace. It lay for a moment on top of the logs and then, quite suddenly, the flames shot high as the wax ignited. The dummy was lost behind the blue and yellow flames. Finally they, too, were submerged behind a gust of smoke.

From the heart of the smoke came a long, wailing scream in the voice of a woman.

Before the scream died, Lalagh had fainted. By the time we had revived her, Mr. Beazle had gone and the fire was burning normally, with no trace of the thing it had consumed.

The party broke up rapidly. We made our way downstairs for our coats. The cloakroom door was locked. When we opened it, a dishevelled figure tumbled out. He was tall and thin and he wore a seedy dinner jacket. He said his name

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was Thompson, he was a professional conjurer, and the agency had sent him to be master of ceremonies at a Halloween party. On arrival four hours earlier, a short round man had bundled him into the cloakroom and locked him in. Mr. Thompson was very sorry he had missed the party, but it hadn't been his fault.

At that point Lalagh fainted again.

And that was Lalagh's last party. She went abroad and has never returned. None of the rest of us has ever referred to the events of that night. There was no general agreement to keep silent: I suppose we all simply felt we would appear so ridiculous if we tried to talk about it.

There is not much more to tell. According to Lalagh's letter she is well and happy and does not intend to return to London. Her letter closed: *PS—Some of these Mexicans have the most amazing primitive beliefs. I intend to devote several years to their study. Mr. Beazle tells me that I show a distinct aptitude.*

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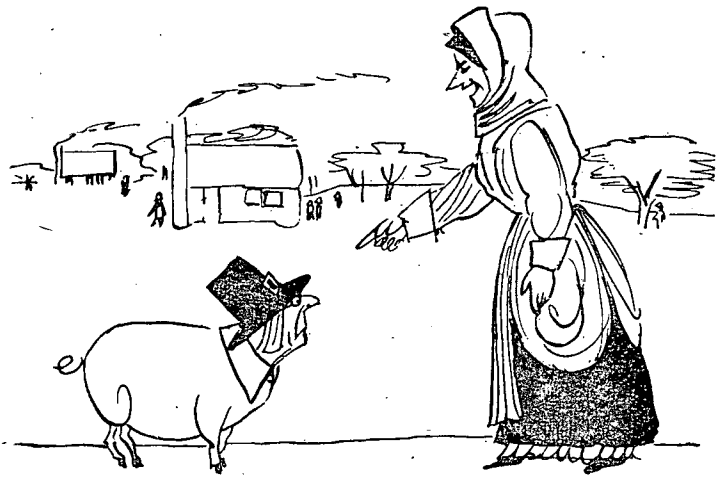

"Witchcraft! Witchcraft! That's your explanation for everything."

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Helen McCloy

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CURTAIN

FACE to face with the doctor, Letty hesitated. "It seems such a little thing, but it . . . bothers me."

"A dream?"

She nodded. "For the last eight months."

"Always the same dream?"

Her glance strayed from the doctor's face to his severely impersonal office. "It begins in all sorts of ways—different scenes, different situations. Sometimes there are policemen. Sometimes a courtroom. But it always works round quite plausibly to the same ending. I seem to be walking down a long empty corridor in an eternal twilight. Suddenly I come to a curtain hanging across the passage, blocking my way. It's only cloth. I could push it aside and go on. But I don't. I stand still within a few feet of it. And then I begin to be afraid.

"The curtain is dark. It hangs in deep, inverted folds, motionless, as if it were carved in stone. There is not a breath of air, but after a few moments the folds begin to ripple and the curtain bellies towards me. Then I know that there is something behind the curtain. Not someone—something. Something unspeakable. The essence of all terror and all evil. That's when I want to run away. Just as I would if I saw a tidal wave sweeping towards me and knew I had only a few seconds to reach high ground.

"I make a frantic effort to turn and run. But my feet are

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lumps of lead. They won't move. Panic mounts from my heart to my brain. I can't think. But there is worse to come. Some force outside myself—invisible and irresistible—lifts my feet from the ground and sets me floating giddily towards the curtain and . . . whatever lies on the other side . . .

"Honestly, doctor, I don't believe I could bear it if I didn't know all the time that I was dreaming."

The doctor's interest quickened. "You know that you are dreaming, while the dream is going on?"

"Of course. Don't you? Doesn't everybody?"

"No. That's what makes a nightmare terrifying to most people. They think it's real while it's going on. But you actually dream that you are dreaming?"

"Yes." Letty was disturbed. "Am I . . . different? I always know it isn't real. Even when the terror is throttling my heart, there is a tiny, detached voice at the back of my mind which says: *Don't be afraid. It's only a dream.*

"That small, sensible voice is the one thing that makes it bearable . . . until I'm lifted into the air, like a toy balloon that has slipped its tether, and wafted against my will towards the curtain. That's when it becomes unbearable."

"But you do bear it." The doctor smiled. "Because you have to."

"Oh, no." Letty smiled back. "I don't have to. And I don't."

"What do you mean?"

"I wake myself. I concentrate my whole attention on the tiny voice that whispers: *It's only a dream.* I answer it and say: *Then wake up. You can if you really want to. You can escape this terror by the simple act of waking. Open your eyes—quick! Before it's too late. Before you reach the other side of the curtain . . .*

"You see," Letty went on earnestly, "I can't get away by running, but I can get away by waking. My body won't obey, but my mind will. And mental escape is just as good as physical escape—in a dream. I can't move from one place to another, but I can move from one state of consciousness to another. I summon all my force of will, all my power of concentration, to wake myself. I make a mental effort, that is curiously like a physical effort. Something clicks and—I'm awake. The dream shimmers a moment. Then it's gone. And that saves me."

"From what?"

"From . . . *the other side of the curtain.*"

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"Why not wake yourself sooner?"

"I wish I could. But I can't do it until the urge to escape becomes almost unbearable. Even then I can only do it by making a great effort of will—an exhausting effort that leaves me weak and panting when I wake . . . You do believe me?"

"Why not?" He shrugged. "All the evidence we have about dreams is necessarily subjective. I've heard of people who pinch themselves to make sure they're not dreaming. I've always wondered why it never occurs to them they may be dreaming that they are pinching themselves. You have no motive that I can see for—embroidering. Some elements of your dream are common enough—the compulsion, the floating . . . But there's one detail that you've omitted."

"I've told you everything."

"Not one thing." His voice dropped to a quiet, suggestive tone. "What is on the other side of the curtain?"

"I don't know." Letty paled. "I don't want to know. I only know that it's horrible and—it has been there, waiting, for a long time."

"Waiting for what?"

"For me."

"Have you any idea what would happen if you refrained from using this power to wake yourself? If you simply let yourself be wafted through the curtain?"

She shook her head.

"Why not try it?"

"I couldn't. You don't know what you're asking."

"But it's only a dream," he reminded her quizzically.

"It's easy to say that—here in the daylight with you. But in that grey twilight where I am all alone . . . The urge to escape is overwhelming."

"If you didn't will yourself to wake up, it might prove interesting psychologically. It might help me to help you."

"I couldn't." Letty was trembling. "I know that if I saw what is on the other side of that curtain I would . . . die."

"Yet you haven't the slightest idea what is there?"

"No. I have no idea of its shape or colour, its function or meaning. I know only one thing: it's something I must never know. Something I must escape."

"Will you promise me one thing?" He was playing with a pen on his desk. "If ever you do go beyond the curtain in this dream, will you let me know what you find there?"

"But I never will," said Letty quickly. "I shall always wake myself in time."

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His glance considered her with a scientist's patient, impersonal curiosity. "Hasn't it occurred to you that you may lose this power of waking yourself?"

"Oh, no!" It was a cry of despair.

"I've known only one other person who had this power—a fellow student at medical school. He lost it when he was about thirteen—at puberty. He had it all through childhood. Then it faded."

"Did he—your friend—see behind the curtain?"

"He didn't dream about a curtain. And after he lost the power, he no longer had nightmares. But you may."

"Doctor, you've got to help me," insisted Letty. "I must get rid of this dream before I lose the power to wake myself. Why do I have this particular dream? That's what I came to find out."

"Let me ask you a question." He paused seeming to choose his words with care. "If you know while you are dreaming that the whole experience is nothing but a dream—why are you so afraid?"

Letty's glance shifted from his direct gaze. "I don't know. Dreams aren't logical."

"Life is not logical," returned the doctor. "So few people—so few scientists realise that. But dreams are logical. In their own way. Because, like logic, they are products of the human mind in its pure state—untrammelled by the limits of matter, space and time. I think I know why you feel so intensely in this dream even while you are realising it is a dream and nothing more."

"Why?"

"Because the source of the fear is not in the dream itself but in your waking life. The curtain in the dream is only a symbol—a shadowy reflection of something real which you fear when you are awake. Waking or dreaming, you know subconsciously that the fear is real. That's why the fear persists even in the dream when you know that the curtain symbolising the fear is only part of an illusion."

"But there is no fear in my waking life!" cried Letty. "Only in my dreams."

The doctor was sceptical. "Nothing comes out of the mind that has not once gone into it. It can't create. It only reflects. Every dream images waking experience. Fear, shame, guilt are things we repudiate or repress in the waking state. So they reappear in our dreams disguised as symbols. Analysis might reveal what source of fear you are repressing in your

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real life. Once we dug that up, you would be rid of your dream."

"That's Freudian, isn't it?" Letty's whole body seemed to recoil fastidiously. "I really don't care for the theories of Dr. Freud. And I have never had any occasion to fear a curtain in real life."

The doctor realised he had lost a patient. He was sorry because her case had roused his curiosity. No doubt she had hoped for a simple panacea: *Eat less meat... Take more exercise*... But he couldn't help her that way. The preliminary physical examination had shown nothing wrong organically... He was too curious to let her go without a few more questions.

"You may have forgotten the occasion. Or, more likely, the curtain is just a symbol. But the fear itself is real. What are you afraid of, Mrs. Jason?"

"Why... nothing..." All her openness was gone now.

"No financial worries?"

"No. My father left me an income that averages eight thousand a year. In a small town like Brookfield, that's ample."

"Happily married?"

"Yes, indeed." Her eyes brightened, her cheeks grew a shade pinker. "Only two months ago."

"And how long have you had this dream?"

"I told you. It began about eight months ago."

"Did anything particular happen about eight months ago?"

She answered promptly. Too promptly. "No. Nothing at all."

"You have many friends in Brookfield?"

"Oh, yes. My mother's and father's friends. My own schoolfriends."

"And your husband's friends, too, no doubt?"

"Not so many. He only came to Brookfield a year ago. He doesn't know many people there."

"His profession?"

"He's an artist. But he hasn't been able to do much painting this last year because he's had trouble with his eyes."

So he married a local heiress, thought the cynical doctor.

Innocently, Letty shattered this hypothesis. "When I said I had eight thousand a year I forgot Ralph's six thousand. We're really quite comfortable on our combined incomes." She rose, pulling on gloves. "Thank you for letting me take up so much of your time. It's been a relief to talk."

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A relief from what? He closed the door of the outer office regretfully.

The nurse-receptionist was busy with a card index on her own desk. He tossed the case card he was holding on to her blotter. "Put this in the inactive file. The lady won't be back. Acute case of well-bred reticence complicated by a puritanical conscience."

"Something bothering that puritanical conscience now?" The nurse picked up the card. "*Mrs. Ralph Jason* . . . Where have I heard that name before?" A startled look came into her eyes. "Why, that woman can't be Mrs. Ralph Jason. She's dead."

The doctor seemed indifferent. False names were not too uncommon with a certain type of inhibited patient. "How do you know Mrs. Ralph Jason is dead?"

"There was something about her in the papers. She was the wife of an artist living in Brookfield and she committed suicide."

"When was this?"

"Let me see. About eight months ago."

"Then this must be the second Mrs. Jason." The doctor pursed his lips. "I wonder—"

"What do you wonder, doctor?"

His eyes looked far away. "Just what is on the other side of that curtain. In her next dream she may find out . . ."

Letty seemed to be sitting in an armchair, dozing before her own fire. As usual in dreams, the scene appeared slightly out of focus.

Beyond the wavering circle of firelight, the pale green walls looked grey in the gloom. Even the vivid, jade green of the rug was subdued to a dull olive. Jagged shadows moved against the walls in silent mimicry of the crackling flames.

As space was enlarged, time was delayed. Seconds seemed to pass slowly as minutes. When her hand reached for a cigarette it seemed to move with ponderous deliberation.

Even Ralph's face looked different across the hearth with his eyelids closed and his head resting against the back of the winged chair. Was it the oblique angle that made his chin look longer and harder, his mouth closer and narrower? Or was it the absence of the eyes, sealed under smooth, motionless lids? Open, the eyes were so jewel-bright, such an odd shade of sea green, they distracted you from his other features. Subtract them, and his chin and mouth leapt into sudden

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prominence, suggesting unsuspected traits of his character.

But then it was not the real Ralph sitting across this dream hearth. It was a mere shadow of the living Ralph—an image reflected in the dark, still pool of her sleeping mind and distorted, like the room. Withdrawn, impersonal—as if some barrier lay between them . . .

The sudden peal of the doorbell ripped through silence. Ralph's eyelids lifted. This was the smiling face she knew so well. She had an odd sense of recognition and relief. *Hello, Ralph, I'm glad you're back. Where were you a moment ago? Not here in this point of space-time with me . . .*

Her glance followed his to the clock. Five minutes after eleven. Too late for ordinary callers in Brookfield.

His lean body rose out of the chair in sections like a straightening jack-knife. How faithfully her fertile dream-memory reproduced his every gait and gesture, all shaped and coloured cunningly as life itself—all done in a flash. A few strides took his long legs down the room, through the archway. She heard the click of the hall switch, the grate of the door latch, the creak of a hinge. Then the mutter of a strange voice. Ralph's answer was pitched higher. "Why, of course. I can't imagine . . . but won't you come in?"

Lights blazed overhead. The walls seemed to leap towards her, the ceiling dropped, the whole room shrank. Fire-glow and dancing, attendant shadows were wiped out as if they had never existed. She felt constricted, almost imprisoned in this cube of harsh, yellow light the room enclosed. A fly in amber. Some instinct of self-defence rather than courtesy made her rise and turn towards the archway, her back to the fire. She wished to look her fate in the face and meet it standing.

They did not look like messengers of fate, the two men following Ralph through the archway. Either one could have served for the figure of John Q. Public in a political cartoon. The first was a stranger. Where had her dream-mind found the material for this animated mask? Some particular face, noticed briefly in a crowd, forgotten consciously, stored up unconsciously? Or was it a synthetic composite of all the strange faces she had ever seen? It must be one or the other. *Nothing comes out of the mind that has not once gone into it.* Someone had told her that quite recently.

It was a flat, meaty face. The grey hair looked thin and greasy, but the brows were still black, thick and bristling. An isolated tuft sprouted between the brows. The eyes were

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dogged and weary. Not intelligent. The eyes of a man who worked hard at some routine job.

The other man she recognised. Who could forget that albino rabbit face? The nibbling, pink mouth, the white-lashed, pink eyes that blinked so rapidly? She had seen him only for a moment this afternoon, loitering in a doorway when she left the doctor's office, standing beside another man whose face was hidden. And she had only noticed him then because she had a vague feeling she had seen him or someone like him once before, long ago.

Ralph was speaking. "Letty, this is Captain Crane and Mr. Mather. Gentlemen, my wife."

Captain Crane? An Army officer in mufti? Or a veteran who insisted on using a military title in civil life? From a great distance she seemed to hear her own voice, "Won't you sit down?"

She was in her own armchair, profile to the fire, hands clasped in her lap. Ralph was on the arm of his chair, filling his pipe. Crane and Mather sat side by side on the little sofa. Crane leaned back as if he were tired. Mather took pains to sit on Crane's right, perching gingerly as if he were embarrassed.

Ralph turned towards Letty, speaking slowly and distinctly. "Captain Crane is from the Police Department."

Silence came with the shock of a loud explosion. Police Department. *Police Department* . . . The words seemed to reverberate down the deepest tunnels of her mind, growing louder instead of fainter as they receded.

"He has a few questions to ask."

"A parking ticket?" Her voice cracked.

"No, Mrs. Jason." Crane turned to look at her gravely. "Doubtless you recall that eight months ago your husband's first wife, Olivia Jason, died of atropine poisoning."

"Atropine sulphate," put in Mather quietly.

Letty bowed because she could not speak. The flare of a match masked Ralph's face. Mather's eye caught Letty's. Hastily he looked in another direction. Who was Mather? Why was he here? He was past the retirement age of the Police Department. He was fat and out of condition. He was timid. Even the illogical dream-mind weaving this fantasy could not have cast him for the role of another policeman.

"The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of suicide." Crane's voice went on colourlessly. "For several reasons. Olivia Jason was a cripple. A motor accident had crippled

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her while Ralph Jason was driving. She blamed him for this and for the fact that internal injuries made it impossible for her to have a child. These things preyed on her mind. The coroner's verdict took all of them into consideration when it brought in a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind."

I must say something, thought Letty. But her tongue was stiff, her throat dry. In her own ears her heartbeats throbbed loudly as if magnified by a microphone.

"The police accepted that verdict at the time, but—" Crane looked directly at Letty. "One thing troubled us, even then. We were unable to trace any purchase of atropine to Olivia Jason."

"That isn't strange." Ralph had taken his pipe-stem out of his mouth. "Atropine sulphate occurs in several patent medicines. In this state they can be bought without a prescription. There are dozens of chemists in Brookfield and its suburbs. Each one has hundreds of customers. Why would any one chemist remember a single customer who made a single purchase of eyedrops?"

Crane pounced. "Why eyedrops, Mr. Jason? Atropine also occurs in rhinitis tablets and some ointments."

"Well, any of those." Ralph's lips closed over the pipe-stem.

Slowly Crane's head swung back towards Letty. "Olivia Jason couldn't drive at all. Even on crutches she could only walk a short distance. Alone, she could not have gone far beyond her own neighbourhood. And she would hardly take anyone with her when she was buying poison for the purpose of suicide. A chemist might remember a crippled customer when he would forget others. Especially if he knew the cripple by sight. And all the chemists in Olivia Jason's neighbourhood did know her by sight. She pestered all of them for some soporific that would help to ease the pain of her crippled legs."

At last Letty managed to speak. "I see."

"Do you?" A touch of sarcasm in Crane's voice. "Since the police accepted the verdict of the coroner's jury there have been two new developments which I would like you to explain —if you can."

Suddenly Letty was cold with that cold which seems to come from within, seeping out through blood-vessels and tissue until, last of all, the skin itself is clammy.

Inexorably Crane went on, "First, you have married Ralph Jason. And second, we have traced a purchase of eyedrops

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containing atropine to you. A purchase that occurred a few days before Olivia Jason's death."

Letty tightened her clasped hands. This was nightmare. Sooner or later it would end as all her nightmares did—the corridor—the curtain—paralysis—a slow, ineluctable drift towards the curtain—and whatever lay on the other side. The tiny voice at the back of her mind was whispering, *Don't be afraid. It's only a dream.* Mentally she answered as she always did, *Then wake up. You can if you really want to. You can escape all this terror by the simple act of waking. Open your eyes—quick—before you reach the other side of the curtain.*

Desperately she gathered her forces for the supreme mental effort that was so like a physical effort. But this time nothing happened. Her will slacked with a sudden, sickening limpness and the dream held. She couldn't quite achieve that oddly mechanical click that would release her from horror and put her back in her own bed between cool sheets, with Ralph beside her and maple leaves sighing in the dark beyond the open window . . . The doctor's voice came back to her, *You may lose this power of waking yourself* . . . Had she lost the power so soon? Could it be that those words of the doctor, so carelessly uttered, were acting now on her subconscious mind like a post-hypnotic suggestion, inhibiting that power to wake herself at will? But she wouldn't be able to bear it when she came to the curtain. If she couldn't wake then she would die . . .

"Why shouldn't Letty buy eyedrops? Lots of people do." That was Ralph's voice, but less firm than usual.

Does he . . . doubt me? The thought pierced Letty's heart like a knife. *Even in a dream I can't bear Ralph to doubt me. Why should my own subconscious mind torture me by inventing such a dream? Nothing comes out of the mind that has not once gone into it . . . Have I had the idea that I might be accused of Olivia's murder all along, in the waking state, ever since her death? And that Ralph might suspect me? Of course, I have never allowed myself to think of such things consciously but . . . what has been going on in my subconscious mind since Olivia died? Something like this?*

Captain Crane answered Ralph quietly. "Lots of people buy eyedrops who have something the matter with their eyes. Usually iritis when the drops contain atropine. Sometimes keratitis. We have examined the record of a medical examination given to Letty Jason when she was still Letty Knowles

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and applied for overseas service with the OWI during the war. Her eyes were normal then." He turned back to Letty. "Mrs. Jason, have you developed iritis or keratitis since then? If so, the fact can be established very simply by your submitting to an oculist's examination."

Letty heard her own voice, low and shaking. "My eyes are still perfectly normal."

"You don't have to answer him, dear!" That was Ralph.

"*I have to warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you?*" Letty's voice rose shrilly over the cliché. Then she laughed. "Is that it, Captain Crane?"

"I'm afraid it is, Mrs. Jason." To her amazement, she saw he was perfectly serious. "Unless you have some explanation of that purchase of atropine. I came here late this evening because I had to go through certain formalities first in order to secure a warrant for your arrest on a charge of murder in the first degree."

"Here! Wait a minute!" Ralph's pipe clattered on the hearthstone. He was on his feet, his green eyes fever-bright, his thin cheeks flushed an unnatural red. "You say you've traced the purchase of eyedrops containing atropine to Letty. I suppose that means some fool chemist thought he recognised her photograph after eight months. Can you do a thing like this on one flimsy identification?"

"Identification and motive and a few other things that will come out at the trial," returned Crane. "It was not an identification by photograph either." He looked at Mather. A bead of sweat gathered on Mather's forehead. "This is the chemist, Mr. Mather," went on Crane. "He identified Letty Jason this afternoon when he stood with me outside the door of a doctor's office in the city and saw her come out. He was sure of the identification then, but I brought him with me this evening so that he could see her at close range and be doubly sure. We had a prearranged signal. When he sat down on my right it meant that he was absolutely sure—that I could go ahead with the arrest."

"How can he be sure?" demanded Ralph. "When he only saw her once before, for a moment, eight months ago?"

"That will come out at the trial. Every murderer makes at least one slip. Fortunately for us Mrs. Jason was in a state of agitation when she bought the eyedrops and she made her one slip then."

Ralph whirled on Mather. "Are you sure? After all these months? Do you realise what you are doing to her?"

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One moment ticked away while Mather looked into Letty's eyes. Then a strange thing happened—a thing she thought characteristic of the dream-world where there is no consistency or plausibility in the way people behave. Tears gathered in Mather's pink eyes—one, then two, trickled down his quivering cheeks. He was weeping for her and weeping for himself.

"Yes. I'm sure," he whispered hoarsely. "I remember the light, taffy-coloured hair and the dark, brown eyes and the three little moles that form a triangle on her right cheek. She looked so pretty when she ran in, hurried and hatless, asking for the eyedrops... that summer day... I'm sure, but... Oh, God! I wish I wasn't sure! I'm so sorry..."

"You're sorry!" Ralph's voice was hard. "You damned snivelling sentimentalist! If you're so sorry, why in hell didn't you keep your mouth shut?"

Letty felt Ralph's hands, warm and rough, against her icicle fingers. "Don't worry, darling. We'll get the best lawyer in the city. It's all a silly mistake—circumstantial evidence. We'll find the chemist who sold Olivia the stuff if we have to hire a hundred private detectives..."

Captain Crane's hand touched her elbow with authority. "Ready, Mrs. Jason...?"

Every time Letty raised her eyes from the concrete floor to the stone wall, the striped shadow of the barred window had moved a few more inches with the movement of the sun. The universe wasn't running down—it was running away, racing, tearing, skidding down the slope towards the abyss without a hand to stay the throttle... Impressions were a jumble of flashes, scattered and incoherent as a montage of films.

The day the lawyer came. A core of callousness sheathed in a skin of synthetic sympathy, smooth and cold. "Just one question, Mrs. Jason. Did you buy that patent eye medicine from the chemist, Mather? The whole case is going to turn on that point."

Blood drained from her face. Her swollen heart laboured to expel the overload. She began to tremble—lips, hands, knees. Why did he ask? Did he know the truth?

"No," she whispered. "Oh, no."

Bleak eyes were looking at her, without sympathy, without hope. "Mather's story is... circumstantial. Just what did you do that afternoon of June twenty-first? Remember?"

"How can I?" Letty looked blank. "That was eight months ago."

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The lawyer's mouth thinned to a harder line. "Mrs. Jason, your life depends on this. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me, frankly and in confidence, are you protecting anyone?"

"No. Please don't question me any more. Please."

In his eyes she saw a new-born idea quicken to life and grow. His lips scarcely moved. Perhaps he did not realise he had spoken his thought aloud. But she caught the words. And the look of contempt. "You did buy it, didn't you?"

Ralph came the day before the trial. Looking in his face was like looking in the mirror her cell lacked for fear she would break it and use the splinters to slash throat or wrist. His look of thin, bloodless skin, stretched taut over unfleshed bone, must be her own look after these weeks of strain.

"We haven't been able to trace the purchase of atropine to Olivia," he said soberly. "She must have got it somewhere. I've a dozen private detectives working on it. They'll turn up something before it's too late."

"Suppose they don't." Her quiet voice seemed to startle him. Had he never really considered that possibility until now?

He glanced towards the guard and dropped his voice. "Then . . . we'll have to tell the truth."

She whispered. "Is there no other way?"

"It won't be too bad," he argued. "I had a perfectly good reason for asking you to buy those eyedrops for me. The chief point against you is the fact that you bought the drops when you didn't need atropine for your eyes. But I did need it. I've been using the drops for years. And I still do. As I told you before, we can always prove that by a medical examination of my eyes. It would be different if my eyes were normal like yours. But since I can prove that I have a mild case of chronic iritis they can't convict me on the case as it stands."

"They couldn't convict," said Letty. "But they would suspect. That's why I agreed to keep quiet about the eyedrops when Olivia poisoned herself with the same drug you use for your eyes. Once they knew about that, they would look for other evidence against you."

"They could look till doomsday. They wouldn't find a thing."

"If only there were some other way I could clear myself without involving you. The chemist who sold atropine to

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Olivia must exist. She couldn't walk far. She must have got the stuff in this neighbourhood somehow . . . Or could she have used an old phial of your eyedrops?"

"She couldn't. There was never any left over. And I always carried the current phial in my pocket."

"Ralph, why did Olivia choose atropine?"

"What do you mean?"

Letty mused aloud. "Atropine . . . The name comes from Atropos. Wasn't she the one among the Three Fates who snipped the thread of life with her shears? An oddly feminine figure for Death, almost domestic. The neat, industrious seamstress . . . the spinster, cutting what she had spun. Olivia was feminine, domestic. She loved to sew. And you know she hated you. Because you were driving the car when it crashed and she was crippled . . . Do you suppose she chose that particular drug as her poison deliberately because she knew that it was the drug you used for your eyes?"

"What good would that do her?"

"She hoped that you would be prosecuted for her murder."

"Letty! Do you really think that Olivia would kill herself simply to make me suffer?"

"She hadn't much to live for. Lameness, pain . . ."

"What if she did? We can't prove it now. And, damn it, she must have got the stuff somewhere! If only we had more time to trace her movements on that day before her death when she went out alone . . ."

Letty drew a deep breath, nerving herself for the sacrifice it was so plain he expected.

"Don't tell the lawyer . . . yet."

"You're quite sure you can wait? A little longer?"

"Let's leave the truth till the last moment. We'll always have it to fall back upon, if worst comes to worst . . . Isn't there anyone else who might have poisoned Olivia? You told me once she was on bad terms with a servant—"

Ralph dismissed this.

"Hardly a motive for murder. What made you think of such a thing?"

"The fact that you haven't been able to trace the purchase of atropine to Olivia, with all these men working on that one point. Could it mean that she never bought the stuff at all? That someone else we haven't even suspected poisoned her under our noses?"

"She saw so few people," muttered Ralph. "Her doctor . . . her lawyer . . . and her servant . . . It doesn't seem possible . . ."

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Letty's nightmares were always wintry and twilit. So she was not surprised to find the vast courtroom bathed in a melancholy, grey dusk on each day of the trial. The judge, high on his bench, was one of the archetypes characteristic of dreams. Saturn as El Greco painted him—senile and vicious, the old man of the tribe devouring his own children. Bloodshot eyes, bloodless lips, papery skin—he looked the enemy of everything that changed and therefore the enemy of life itself, the delegate of death.

But when Letty turned her eyes the other way she found no comfort. Merely tier upon tier of heads, blank and yellowish as gourds, in the shadowless light, almost as misshapen, quite as empty. Only the eyes were alive—watching her.

Like mechanical dolls the witnesses shuttled on and off the stand. Press a spring and each could squeak a few thin, metallic words. People whom Letty had hardly noticed as human beings were now determining her fate—Olivia's cook, Olivia's doctor and lawyer, Olivia's milkman and grocer, the little chemist, Mather.

Yes, I was the first Mrs. Jason's cook. Tongue like a serpent she had. I told her what I thought of her when she fired me. Nagging, selfish old thing. I didn't care if she was a cripple. I always pitied her poor husband. Yes, the second Mrs. Jason—Miss Knowles as she was then—used to come through the kitchen from the tennis court when Mrs. Jason's luncheon tray was being set out on the table. Usually tea or a glass of milk and salad and a custard . . . Yes, Miss Knowles was always running in to see if Mrs. Jason wanted anything and Miss Knowles was often passing through the kitchen alone because I'd be answering the doorbell or the telephone. She'd pass me in the front hall. I remember two times she took the tray up to Mrs. Jason alone. Right before Mrs. Jason's death, that was . . . Well, within a day or so . . .

Yes, I was the first Mrs. Jason's doctor . . . Yes, I think I may say her injuries affected her attitude towards Mr. Jason . . .

Yes, I was the first Mrs. Jason's lawyer. When they were first married she made a will leaving everything to Mr. Jason . . . About six thousand a year. She told me he had nothing of his own . . .

Yes, I'm a chemist. I prefer the word pharmacist. Mather is the name. Fred Mather . . . I'll explain how I can remember her buying the eyedrops after eight months. You see, I'd just set up in business for myself. New store and everything. I

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wanted trade, so I made a point of asking each woman customer for her name and address so I could send her folders and samples whenever I got in a new line of cosmetics. Mrs. Jason—Miss Knowles then—gave me her name and address. Seems funny now that she didn't think of giving a false name, but, as Captain Crane said to me, all murderers make some slip somewhere or they'd never be caught . . .

Objection! . . .

Sustained. Pray continue . . .

During the last eight months I've mailed several folders and other stuff to Miss Knowles. Then, when her marriage to this Mr. Jason was announced in the papers, I remembered her. And I remembered how I first saw her, that day she came in to buy eyedrops with atropine in them. And then I remembered reading about an inquest on an Olivia Jason who had died of atropine poisoning. Seemed sort of queer, taken altogether, so I went round to the nearest police station and told them about it . . . Oh, yes, the bottle was clearly marked: *Poison—For External Use Only.* No, it's not very strong . . . A one per cent solution of atropine sulphate. The dose was clearly marked, too: *One or two drops in each eye every three hours* . . . Well, a twentieth of a grain is supposed to be the fatal dose and if you drank the whole bottle that's about what you'd get . . .

Letty could no longer distinguish words. Just a humming crescendo of accusation, exquisitely titillating to the participants. The hunt was up, the hounds were in full cry, all inhibitions against cruelty resolved by the rationale of punishment—the one thing that makes it possible for sadists to live comfortably in an organised society.

Now Ralph was on the stand. Letty could tell by the look of her own lawyer that Ralph's testimony had not helped. Somehow, for all his good intentions, the prosecutor had trapped him into several damaging admissions—the unhappiness of his first marriage and his utter failure to trace Olivia's purchase of atropine. But after all, how could he deny these things under oath when so many other witnesses had testified to them already?

Court is adjourned . . .

Letty faced her lawyer again. His face was serious now and, for the first time, compassionate. As if he felt she were already judged and doomed. As if justice could do no more and the time for mercy had come.

"Mrs. Jason, if you know of anything further in your own

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defence, it must come out now. This is your last chance. So far everything has been against you."

"You mean—there's no hope of my being acquitted?"

"None whatever."

Letty expelled her breath in a great sigh. "As a last resort—call my husband to the stand again."

"Why?"

"You'll find out when you call him."

"That won't do, Mrs. Jason. I can't question him intelligently unless I know what I'm questioning him about. I'm surprised your husband hasn't come forward before now—if he knows anything that would clear you. Or did he advise you to wait till the last minute?"

"No, no. I advised him."

"Why?"

"I was afraid of . . ."

"Of what?"

"It's simple really. Ralph and I were driving together that afternoon of June twenty-second, the day before Olivia killed herself. Ralph had to stop to fix the car—something wrong with the carburettor. I got out and strolled around. He asked me to stop in a chemist's and get this patent thing for him—the eyedrops. He has a tendency to chronic iritis. A medical examination of his eyes will prove it."

Her voice trailed off into silence as she saw the lawyer's expression. "You should have told me all this before. We should have had the medical examination made before the trial began. And an oculist to testify. Now there's no time, but the case is so desperate, we'll have to take a chance . . ."

It was very late now. The grey dusk was darker. Everything was dimmer. The old judge sat so still, his pallid face so expressionless, that Letty had the wild fancy he might have died there on the bench and no-one had noticed the difference. All the other faces looked flat to her bemused eyes, as if they were painted on a backdrop to simulate spectators in a courtroom scene. The only living face was Ralph's as he mounted the stand again. A model witness—serious, alert, choosing each word with sober deliberation—only . . . he wasn't saying the right things.

"I never asked Letty, my present wife, to buy patent eyedrops for me containing atropine. Not on June twenty-second—not on any other day . . . No, I have never used eyedrops containing atropine sulphate . . . No, there is nothing the matter

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with my eyes. I have never had iritis, acute or chronic. A medical examination will prove the truth of that statement, I believe."

Letty's lawyer stammered. "B-but—if I call your wife to the stand and she testifies that she remembers clearly . . ."

Before the prosecutor could object to this most irregular question, Ralph had slipped in an answer equally irregular but none the less effective. "I have known for some time that Letty was given to . . . exaggeration, but I did not believe her capable of . . . murder."

"Your honour, I protest that—"

"Oh, boy, has he put the rope round her neck! Where's that telephone?"

"My God, wasn't he supposed to be a witness for the defence?"

"Well, what would you do if you suddenly realised right on the witness stand that your second wife must have poisoned your first wife? The minute he knew she'd suggested that line of questioning to her lawyer, he knew she was guilty and counting on his pity or gallantry to back up her story . . ."

The guard touched Letty's arm. She stood still, looking across a heaving sea of faces to Ralph's face, a little higher than the others—a face that looked suddenly cold, triumphant, and evil. No medical examination of his eyes was necessary for her. She knew he would not make this statement on the witness stand unless it could be proved. She had only had his word for the statement that the peculiar sea-green colour of the iris in his eyes was the effect of iritis on eyes naturally blue. That was a symptom of the disease, she knew. But she also knew that some people are born with light green irises. There had been occasional inflammation, but that could be simulated . . . vinegar or pepper . . . She had seen him use eyedrops, but they were clear and colourless as water. They could have been water. She was no doctor. She couldn't tell by merely looking at his eyes whether he needed atropine drops or not. Until this moment she had not recalled hearing somewhere, at some time, that even the mildest case of iritis would leave the eyes dull as well as inflamed. Ralph's eyes had always been so jewel-bright.

It was not only her ignorance that made her vulnerable. It was also her trust in him. The one thing that had never occurred to her was to doubt his good faith, to ask for confirmation of any statement he made. No doubt he had counted

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on that. When had he first told her about his sick eyes? The day after the accident that crippled Olivia . . . Accident? Of course not. Ralph had inherited Olivia's six thousand a year as he would now inherit Letty's eight thousand. No wonder Olivia had hated him—crippled, helpless, suspecting the truth, hesitating to change her will until it was too late.

She saw all this and more in one brilliant flash of realisation. The events of her life were no longer in sequence but all spread out before her in one continuous pattern. Time had ceased to exist. She was seeing her whole life all at once as an entity with a shape of its own—the Long Body of the Hindus, the body that extends in the dimension of time as well as in the dimensions of space. It was all one piece, shaped from the beginning to the end where she now found herself, predetermined by a shy, lonely girlhood that was to make her in later life the easy prey of a plausible adventurer. She had wanted to be fooled because it was so pleasant to be fooled by Ralph. And now that pleasant fooling had brought her to the foot of the scaffold.

The horror that had lain waiting in ambush for her behind the symbolic curtain of her other nightmares was simply herself—her own life seen as an integral whole, the Long Body that few mortals can bear to look upon. For the truth about Ralph and Olivia was a part of that ultimate self which she had always suspected, and never admitted in the waking state. Which in other dreams she had masked with a symbolic curtain and fled by willing herself awake.

Wake . . .

She didn't have to bear this horror. There was one way she could escape—by waking. It didn't matter whether the jury acquitted her or not. It didn't matter whether the judge condemned her or not. It didn't matter whether Ralph betrayed her or not. For this was only a dream. All these people—judge, jury, Ralph himself—were not real.

She and Ralph would laugh about this dream tomorrow at breakfast. *Ralph, I had the most impossible nightmare last night. I dreamed that you had murdered Olivia and got me accused of the murder in your place by neatly providing me with means and opportunity beforehand. You even provided me with a motive—by marrying me. And then you repudiated me on the witness stand so cleverly that no-one would think for a moment we had conspired together to kill her. As of course we hadn't. I was the dupe* . . . And Ralph would answer: *So that's what your subconscious mind really thinks*

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of me! Or was it the mince pie and cheese we had for dinner?

She gathered her powers of concentration together and looked steadily at the dream courtroom telling herself to wake, straining for that mental click that would wipe out all this ugliness and restore her to her own bedroom, cool and fresh from the night wind pouring through the open windows. In another moment the whole scene should begin to shimmer and crumple as if it were all painted on gauze that was about to waver and collapse.

But this time there was no wavering. Again the dream held. Even in the waking state her sense of external things had never been more vivid and detailed than it was at this moment. The nick in the prosecutor's front tooth, the bristle that sprang from a mole on the judge's chin casting a thread of shadow, the spiral paths left by fingertips on a dusty electric bulb overhead. And Ralph's supple features still twisted into a mask of shock and grief.

She could not bear to look that treachery in the face a moment longer. *You know it's only a dream! Wake up!*

Then the last veil fell. Truth stood before her, whole and hideous, the greatest horror of all.

She was awake.

She had been awake all along. From that first moment of shock when she had seemed to be dozing before the fire in a dream and Ralph had brought two strangers into the living room, her tortured mind had sustained the illusion of a dream as a refuge from terror and disillusion. That was why she had not walked down a corridor towards a curtain in this nightmare, as she did in all the others.

Other people mistook a dream for reality while they were dreaming. She had mistaken reality for a dream while she was waking. Was it so strange when reality itself had so many dream qualities? Incoherence, illogic, injustice, relativity in the duration of time, inexhaustible fertility in the invention of character and incident, the haunting sense of uneasiness, the feeling of being swept on helplessly by an inexorable current from an unknown source to an unknown destination. All she had ever known of reality was its reflection in the mind. A dream was simply a less disciplined reflection of that same reality in that same mind. Easy enough to mistake one for the other.

But this was not a dream: this nightmare was life itself.

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LOVE and KISSES

QUESTION:

I wrote passionate appeals to a certain girl. I did not know she had a boyfriend who is powerful in size and is in boxing contests. She gave him my letters and told me he would beat me to the ground. I cannot hide from him, he uses my beerhall. What can I do to save myself, for I am a tender little bloke?

ANSWER:

Either change your beerhall, or next time you see the boxer, quickly buy a beer for him. Then, when he is drinking it, apologise.

Quoted from Tell Me, Josephine, an anthology of letters from readers of the Central African Mail

No Time to Lose

Why don't the men propose, Mamma?
Why don't the men propose?
Each seems just coming to the point,
And then away he goes;
It is no fault of yours, Mamma,
That everybody knows;
You fête the finest men in town,
Yet, oh! they won't propose.

And what is to be done, Mamma?
Oh, what is to be done?
I really have no time to lose,
For I am thirty-one;
At balls I am too often left
Where spinsters sit in rows;
Why don't the men propose, Mamma?
Why won't the men propose?

THOMAS HAYNES BAYLY

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Sized Up

In fiction she is always radiantly beautiful, and her "fresh young spirit" takes the winds of March with beauty... as a matter of fact sweethearts are seldom radiantly beautiful, and their fresh spirits, when they have any, rather distress one. As a rule it is the fresh young spirit of calculation that imbues them...

When you go to her she will drop her eyelids and blush, and say it is sudden; but depend upon it, she has had you sized up and your whole dossier at her fingers' ends for months past.

Nine times out of ten she says, "Yes" and looks extremely stupid. Then you kiss her and she says it's a nice day...

The engagement ring is never exactly the ring of her dreams, and if she can compass the name of the jeweller who sold it to you she will be round there on little wings of haste, to inquire the price...

T. W. H. CROSLAND, *Lovely Woman*

Have I a wife? Bedam I have!
But we was badly mated:
I hit her a great clout one night,
And now we're separated.
And mornings, going to work,
I meets her on the quay:
"Good mornin' to ye, ma'am," says I;
"To hell with ye," says she.

L. A. G. STRONG, *The Brewer's Man*

Mighty Silly

This evening I observed my wife mighty dull and I myself was not mighty fond, because of some hard words she did give me at noon, out of a jealousy at my being abroad this morning, which, God knows, it was upon the business of the Office unexpectedly: but I to bed, not thinking but she would come after me... At last, about one o'clock, she come to my side of the bed, and drew my curtaine open, and with the tongs red hot at the ends, made as if she did design to pinch me with them, at which, in dismay, I rose up, and with a few words she laid them down; and did by little and little, very sillily, let all the discourse fall...

SAMUEL PEPYS, *Diary, 12 January, 1669*

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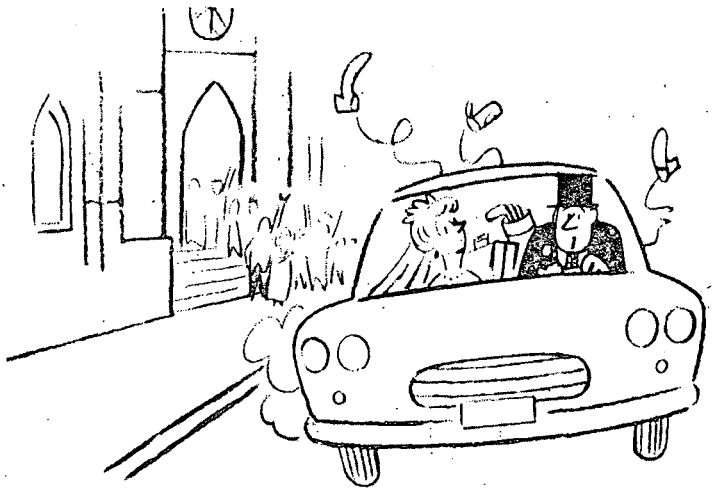

"This is going to be hard to explain to my wife."

Chewing the Fat

The next time the telephone rang it was Gertrude Gristle, a four-times married, fortyish member of the bankrupt sex, now trying to regain her losses by making it five.

"Hello, Gertrude, how nice to hear from you. What are you doing in Madrid, I thought you'd be in Paris this—"

"Well, I'm in Madrid because, well, you remember Baron Cadwalder von Flipper, well, he asked me to marry him and I said yes, and had practically sent out the invitations, we were going to be married during a balloon ascension, great fun don't you think, well, I got the most awful news and came to Madrid to shoot him."

"But what for, Gertrude? After all—"

"What *for*? My dear, not only is he a cad, and I found out not as rich as he let everyone think he was—imagine telling everybody he was going to buy me North Dakota—but not only did he exaggerate his money, but, I just can't say it, I feel sick as a cat."

"But Gertrude, you must pull—"

"I've decided to tell you. Better than keeping it pent up inside, I guess. Cadwalder is married."

"He's what . . .?"

"Yes dear, aren't men simply ghastly? The old trout . . ."

DORIS LILLY, *How to Make Love in Five Languages*

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SUBMISSION

by B. Traven

When a woman refuses to be tamed . . . in the land where the gun is law

IN A LITTLE town in the romantic state of Michoacan there lived a young lady whose father had been the owner of a prosperous saddleshop and through his capacity and hard work had become very well-to-do. Luisa Bravo was the only child in the family. The inheritance from her parents, who had died one shortly after the other, made her a rich girl and there was every prospect that, upon the death of her grandmother and her aunt, she would, in due time, be even richer.

Ever since she was weaned, Luisa had been spoiled and fussed over flauntingly. Every wish of hers was fulfilled immediately and her slightest desire attended to. Besides, since she was very beautiful even when still a child, she was admired and flattered by all who came in contact with her.

However, the term obedience was unknown to her, yet not in the case of others, including her parents, her grandmother and her aunt who, after her parents' death, lived with her in the parental home. She never submitted to anybody's will and nobody ever even tried to insist that she should obey no matter whom and under what conditions.

She was quick of temper which would degenerate into a sort of explosion frequently even over the most ridiculous, in fact insignificant, cause. The Indian servant girls and the boy apprentices in her father's shop, would run away and hide themselves for hours before they ventured to come back.

Nevertheless, Luisa possessed also some fine and noble qualities. Among them that of being very generous and liberal. And a generous person, one who cannot bear to see anyone go hungry and who is always free with a *peso* or with a pair of old shoes or with a discarded, though still presentable, dress is easily forgiven for whatever bad temper now and then she may indulge in.

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There were actually days when she was not only bearable, but unbelievably charming and so much so that everybody smilingly forgot whatever she had done or said in a rash way.

Many a young man who was entranced by the beauty of the lady and even more so by her money, thought that once married to her he surely would be man enough to insist upon being lord and master in the house. Yet as soon as they had become better acquainted with her, they would never again dream of trying to break in that temperamental woman because they realised that such a tryout could be attempted only at the risk of the tamer's inevitable invalidism.

Now, of course, like any other female, she, too, grew older with the years. At present she had reached twenty-four—an age that doesn't look particularly good where marital possibilities, in which she still has a decisive say, are concerned. Generally, at about that age, a Mexican lady takes what she can get and endeavours to make the best of it.

Luisa's case, though, was different. She did not care whether or not she still was in line with the eligibles. The conviction grew within her that it might be better not to marry since in this way there would be less trouble about obeying or pleasing anybody; that for a woman with sufficient means life might really be more agreeable and more satisfying without being married.

And it so happened that in that same State of Michoacan there lived a man who went by the good and honest, though simple, name of Juvencio Cosío.

Don Juvencio owned a ranch, not far from the town where Luisa lived. The distance was about two hours' ride on horseback. He was not exactly rich but fairly well-off as he knew how to manage his ranch successfully and to his good advantage.

He was about thirty-five, regularly built, of normal appearance, neither goodlooking nor ugly, well, just about like any average man who does not command attention and who has not broken world records in any field of sports.

Whether or not he had ever heard of Señorita Luisa Bravo, will never be known. Whenever, as later on now and then happened, the question was put to him directly he simply replied: "Definitely no!"

Most probably this was true; yet undoubtedly it was also true that nobody had warned him against her.

One day the idea occurred to him that it was about time to

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buy himself a new saddle, since the old one had really become rather shabby. He mounted his horse and rode to town. Looking around he came to Luisa's shop and saw the finest and best made saddles in her *talabartería.*

Luisa had not sold the business her father had left her, because she had not been able to get the price which she thought the business was worth. As a result, she had decided to keep the shop and to run it with the help of the old foreman, who had worked with her father for more than thirty-five years, and the two married employees who also had been with him for many years. It turned out much easier than she had imagined. She busied herself in the shop and kept the books, while her aunt and grandmother tended the house. The business flourished and since workmanship had remained equally good and customers had increased, the income from the business had become much higher than it ever had been in her father's time.

Luisa happened to be in the shop when Don Juvencio was looking at the saddles which were displayed, hung up at the entrance, spread out in the window and along the outer walls of the building.

She came to the door and watched him for a minute while he, with the air of a connoisseur and a user, carefully examined the saddles as to value, design and durability. He suddenly looked up and his gaze remained for a moment on Luisa's face. And Luisa, though later she was never able to explain to herself why, openly smiled at him. But she said nothing and did not invite him to enter the store to look at the saddles stocked inside. Neither did she urge him on with words or try to praise her wares.

The frank and open smile caught Don Juvencio unawares and he turned slightly shy. Still in front of the door, he said, "*Buenos dias, señorita,* I want to buy myself a new saddle, perhaps even two."

"As many as you like, *señor,*" replied Luisa. "*Pase usted, señor,* and take a look at the saddles which we have inside; perhaps you may like one of them better still since we don't display the good ones where they are spoiled by sun, air and dust."

"*Con su permiso,*" Don Juvencio said and followed her inside.

He looked at all the saddles. But, strangely, he seemed to have lost the faculty of examining them soberly and without prejudice. Though he tapped the saddletrees, scratched the leather and got noisy with the straps, his thoughts were only

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superficially on the saddles. He said little and what he did say referred only to the merchandise.

Suddenly he looked up rapidly as if about to ask something. And though Luisa turned her eyes immediately, he had caught enough of her look to be well aware of the fact that, during the whole time, she had been examining him as searchingly as he had been studying the saddles.

Realising that she had been taken by surprise while her eyes stayed fixed on his face, it was her turn now to become shy. Pink colours rose to her face. But she controlled herself, smiled at him, and replied, businesslike, to his inquiry about the price of a saddle which he had just lifted from the stand, examining it in detail.

He asked the values of a few others, but she felt that he now was only asking so as to have something to say.

He inquired about where the leather, which was used for the saddles, came from, how business was going, how many hands were employed and some other trifles.

Now she wanted to know where he was from and how his affairs were doing. He introduced himself, told her about his ranch, about the number of heads of cattle, horses and mules he owned, how much corn he had sold during the last year, and how many pigs, and how prices had been.

For the moment nothing more was said about saddles.

And half an hour or so later—neither of them had paid attention to time—he thought that he'd better return to the subject, so as not to make it look too obvious why he had kept up the conversation.

"I think I'll take this one," he finally said, pointing at the most beautiful and most expensive of the saddles in the store. "Well, on second thoughts, I believe I'll think it over and have a look at some other stores in town. If you would hold this saddle for me until tomorrow, I'll come back and decide definitely whether or not I take it. *Bueno, hasta mañana, señorita.*"

"*Hasta mañana, señor,*" said Luisa, as he left the premises.

The fact that he did not immediately decide to buy was in no way surprising to her as a business woman. But with the female's sharp instinct, she knew that he had made his decision in respect to the saddle and that he had only postponed the actual purchase to have a reason to come back again tomorrow.

Of course, he did not look at any saddles at any other place but, as if in deep thought, strolled leisurely to the inn where he had tied his horse to a post, mounted, and slowly rode home.

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When he arrived at his ranch he realised that he was hopelessly in love . . .

On the stroke of nine the following morning he was back in the shop.

When he found an elderly lady tending the store he felt like having been cheated. "*Perdóneme, señora,*" he said after greeting the lady, "yesterday I looked at some saddles here. But the *señorita* in charge was going to show me some others kept I don't know where."

"Oh yes, that was Luisa, my niece. Now see here, *caballero*, I don't know what saddles she might have referred to. She just went shopping. If you will wait, please, only ten minutes, she'll be back and I'm sure she'll be delighted to show you the saddles."

Juvencio did not have to wait the full ten minutes before Luisa returned.

Both smiled at each other like old acquaintances.

When Luisa sent her aunt immediately on some errand into the house, Juvencio understood that she, Luisa, was not disinclined to spend a short time alone with him.

As if only naturally, he again commenced to examine all the saddles. However conversation, following apparently an unspoken wish of both, soon deviated from saddles and ran to other topics.

Almost one hour passed in their exchange of sociable nothings before he finally became aware that he had to leave now at last, so he decided to buy the saddle, extracted the money from his *vibora*, that his, his coin belt, piece by piece, and laid it out on the counter.

Once she had taken the money and thus the deal had been closed, he prepared his comeback, "*Señorita,*" he said, "there are a few other articles which I might need and if you don't mind I'll return within a few days."

"This house is yours, *caballero*, return, please, whenever you wish. You will always be welcome, I'm sure."

"Do you really mean it, *señorita*? Or do you say it only as a polite business phrase?"

"No," Luisa laughed, "I really mean it. And to show you how sincere I am, won't you please us by coming into the house and lunch with us? You know, this is our lunch hour."

When Luisa and Juvencio entered the *comedor*, that is, the dining room, the aunt and the grandmother seemed to have finished lunch already, apparently unwilling to wait so long and, besides, accustomed to Luisa's eating when she felt like

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it and not when others wished to do so or even ordered it, they stuck to their regular hours.

Yet out of courtesy the two remained at the table until the first dish had been passed. Now they offered a few friendly words to their guest, got up and left the room.

The luncheon of the two left to themselves lasted nearly one and a half hours.

Not on the following day but on the morning after, Don Juvencio returned, this time to buy some saddle girths.

And from that day on, he appeared almost every other day, to buy something, to change something else, to order something to be custom-made. That he had to sit down to lunch every time he visited the shop, soon became an established rule. Now and then it happened that he had to attend to some other business in town which delayed him often longer than he had foreseen and thus, of course, he stayed for dinner also.

On one occasion he had been unable to get into town until late in the afternoon. And when he arrived at Luisa's it started to rain. So he was asked to remain for supper. But the rain soon became a heavy downpour, visibility in the night was near zero and the rain, instead of ceasing, grew more violent every moment. Why go to a hotel, the ladies said and spend money unnecessarily, when he could stay at the house, where there were sufficient vacant rooms, and even if the bed offered was perhaps not the finest, in no case would it be worse than the beds at the hotel? So it followed that he spent the long evening with Luisa and gratefully accepted their hospitality for the night.

Two weeks had passed, when he invited Luisa and the elderly ladies to spend a Sunday at his ranch. Luisa and her aunt went riding on horses which he, early in the morning, had sent into town together with two of his servants to accompany them. The grandmother, though, stayed behind to take care of the house.

From then on events took the course which they always take when a woman and a man believe that they might get along well in marriage and thus put an end to the eternal coming and going which even at its best is really tiresome.

In accordance with the custom of the land he politely asked for Luisa's hand at a formal call on the grandmother and the aunt. Neither offered any objection to the marriage. Don Juvencio was a *caballero*, of honourable family, fairly well-to-do, sober and hard-working, with all the virtues necessary to make a good husband.

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Of course, Juvencio had previously asked Luisa herself and she had answered without hesitating one second, "Yes, naturally."

The grandmother, however, at times would tell the aunt: "Those two are still far from being married, and not until both lie snugly in the same bed shall I believe it. My advice is, don't bother about dresses or anything else yet. Besides I would consider it wise not to tell a single soul in town a word about the whole thing."

The aunt nodded in agreement for she was as doubtful as was the grandmother.

About one week later Juvencio found himself one morning at the store to chat for a while with Luisa. The conversation turned to saddles and Juvencio said, "Well, Licha, all I can tell you is that you don't know a thing about saddles. In spite of the fact that you own a *talabartería* I've forgotten more about saddles and leatherware than you'll ever know, believe you me."

This statement had been provoked by Luisa because of her insistence in being right concerning the quality and value of a certain type of leather, while Juvencio simply would not give in because it went against his better judgment. Being a rancher he had had enough to do with saddles, harnesses and leather in general to know by experience which kind of leather was of good quality, durable and useful or no good at all.

Luisa flew up in a rage and yelled, "Ever since I was little I grew up among saddles, girths, straps and harnesses, and now you mean to tell me to my face that I don't know a thing about saddles and leather!"

"Yes, that I do, because it is my honest opinion," Juvencio said calmly.

"Don't you even dare to imagine for a second that you can order me about even after we're married, which, by the way, I don't believe will ever happen. Nobody is going to order me about, not even you. And you might as well realise it right now and get out of here faster than you can, and never show your stupid face around here unless you want me to throw a couple of flower vases at you and give you a chance to think it over in a hospital. You'll learn who's boss around here and everywhere."

"All right by me," he said leaving, while she violently slammed the door after him, ran into the house and hollered at her aunt, "Well, I got rid of that one, also. Imagine, he

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thought he could talk and do as he liked! I don't need a man after all. Hear me, I don't need a man! And he, imagine, that peasant, he would be the last one I would marry."

Neither the aunt nor the grandmother commented on an occurrence like this one which was no novelty to them. They did not even sigh. In fact, as far as they were concerned, it did not matter whether or not Luisa ever married. They knew perfectly well that, at any rate, Luisa would do only as she pleased, regardless of what the two women did or suggested.

Now it seemed that Juvencio seriously and deeply was in love with the temperamental lass. He did not withdraw as his predecessors had been in the habit of doing after an encounter of this type. Four days later he reappeared one morning at the store. Luisa was unbelievably surprised when suddenly she found herself opposite him. He gave the impression that he had entirely forgotten she had thrown him out and that he had entered the store rather mechanically and out of habit.

Quite possibly Luisa, too, might have nursed in her heart deeper feelings for him than she had ever felt for any of her former suitors. While she was not exactly friendly, she did not reject him. And so it was seemingly nothing but a gesture of politeness that she invited him to lunch at the house.

For a few days, everything went well.

But then came an evening when she maintained that a cow could give milk even though she had not had a calf.

Calmly, he said, "Now see here, Licha, if you've learned that nonsense at school, then the teachers are nothing but stupid old asses."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are wiser than those teachers, you—you—peasant!"

"Wiser or not," he replied very quietly, "just because I am a peasant I know that a cow who has not had a calf cannot give milk whether you milk her in front or in the rear. Where there is no milk nobody can extract some."

"So you mean to tell me that I have not learned anything, that I'm a stupid fool. Well, let me tell you right here and now, and even though you are a peasant: hens can lay eggs and don't need a cock for it."

"Right," he said, "quite right. Even cocks lay eggs when the hens haven't got the time for it and mules even foal and it is also true that many children are born without a father."

"Ho, so you want to contradict me and make fun of me! After all, I was studying while you were feeding pigs!"

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"If we, and I mean people like me and other farmers would not feed pigs, all your super-wise educators would starve to death."

Now she flew up into such a fury as he had never thought could possess any human being.

She yelled at the top of her voice, "Do you admit that I am right or do you?"

"You are right. But a cow that has not had a calf cannot be milked. And if there is such a cow it's a miracle. And miracles are the exception. In agriculture and cattle raising, however, you can rely neither on miracles nor on exceptions."

"So, on top of it you are insulting me?"

"I'm not insulting you. I'm merely telling you facts which out of my experience I know better than you."

The calmness with which he had pronounced these words incited her to even greater fury than a violent contradiction might have caused.

There was a heavy stone water jug on the table. She jumped to her feet, took the jar and flung it at his head with all the force she could muster. Blood ran over his face in a thick stream.

In a film or in a novel worthy to be read by those who have a lot of time on their hands and very few ideas of their own, the young heroine would now have been deeply worried and, sincerely regretting her rash deed, would have washed the wound with a silken handkerchief, would have taken the poor wounded head in her hands, covering it with kisses, and on the following morning both would have marched to the altar and lived for the rest of their lives in happiness and contentment.

But since this was neither a film nor a novel, Luisa only laughed sarcastically, and, looking at her blood-covered suitor, said, "Well, I hope this'll cure you from your eternal stubbornness insisting to know everything better. And if you still preserve a mind to marry me you may just as well learn once and for all this: I'm right, and I give the orders. If you agree to this, all right, and if not, then nothing will come of it and as far as I am concerned you and your superior knowledge and your ordering me around can all go to hell. Find yourself an idiot, with her perhaps you can do what you like. But not with me. Now you know me, so I hope." She went to her room without another word.

He went to see a doctor...

When Juvencio was seen two days later in town with a bandaged head, everybody knew that he and his bride-to-be

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evidently must have come very close to marriage, but that now the whole thing was past and gone.

In spite of all gossip to the contrary, two months later Juvencio and Luisa were married. Evidently he had conceded that he would not insist on being right if she was of a different opinion, and he must also have agreed to her wearing the trousers in their married life. This was accepted as a fact since, otherwise, the marriage would not have been possible.

The opinions of the young men in town were varied. Some said that Don Juvencio must be an unusually brave man thus to place his head between the paws of a tiger. Others thought that he had fallen into a certain sexual dependency which had blinded him, and that he probably would wake up once his desire had cooled off during the wedding night. Others again believed that he had been guilty of some thoughtless negligence towards her and thus was obliged to repair the damage and to marry her, even against his better judgment. And still others maintained that, at the bottom of things, he must be very avaricious and to such a degree that it made him overlook everything else. And then there were those who believed that, perhaps, he was slightly abnormal and fond of being under the yoke and the brutal power of a woman.

Nobody, not even those suitors who had been after Luisa's fortune, envied Juvencio or were even sorry that they had not acted more intelligently while there had been an opportunity. Everyone told himself and his acquaintances that he would hate to be in Juvencio's place.

Throughout the wedding festivities he had been wearing an inscrutable face from which nobody could read whether he was satisfied with the world or not. But all guests noticed that he always acceded to everything that his young wife said; and if, during lengthy conversations the topic came up, pushed especially by the ladies present, as to how the two would arrange this or that in the house or in their future life, he stated that everything would be arranged according to Luisa's wishes. When, as the hours advanced, not only the men but also the ladies were somewhat the worse for drink, the hints about the strong bride and the weak and complacent groom became more and more pointed and it was even hinted that obviously a new era had arrived in Mexico, where at long last women had come into their rights. All these sly jokes which, at times, came very close to ridicule him, left him as indifferent as the man in the moon.

One of his old friends, who had sipped more than he could

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manage, got up and shouted across the table, " Vencho, I think we better send you an ambulance tomorrow morning to pick up the bones."

Rude laughter was heard all around the table.

This was a very risky joke. In Mexico, bold statements such as this, be they made at a funeral, at a christening or at a wedding, more often than not provoked drawn guns and shots—not excepting gatherings of the higher social circles. Hundreds of weddings have ended with three or four deaths—often with the groom among them—and not infrequently, though only through stray bullets, the bride also.

But everything came off peacefully.

The wedding lasted well into the following day. It had been held at the home of the bride. When the festivities were considered ended everybody was dead tired and sufficiently drunk so that nobody, including the newly married couple, thought of anything but of having a good, sound sleep.

It was quite natural, and nobody thought anything of it, nor did it seem against the established rules, that Luisa should go to her room to sleep and that Juvencio went to bed in the room where he had already slept several times when it had been too late to return to his ranch. In fact, none of the guests had the slightest interest in what the two married people were doing or where they were going to spend the next hours. Overtired, with full stomachs and brains drugged from drink, everyone had enough to do caring for himself and had no spare thoughts to waste upon the doings of his neighbour.

On the following morning Juvencio, Luisa, the aunt and the grandmother had breakfast together. Conversation lagged. The two women were in a sentimental mood, because Luisa was now going to abandon the house; and the newly-weds only exchanged indifferent bits of conversation about their horseback ride to the ranch and what would have to be done there most urgently to fix the new home.

Later on, the boys from the ranch arrived with the horses and the pack-mules. Only the most necessary belongings for the first days of Luisa's stay were loaded on the mules, all the other things were to be transported later on by *carretas*.

Once at the ranch, Juvencio did not have much time to look after his pretty wife. A good deal of work had accumulated over the last days and had to be attended to first. A ranch cannot remain idle for a day, or for a few days, like a factory.

With the aid of the old Indian housekeeper and the servants, Doña Luisa proceeded to arrange the place to her liking.

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Night came, and when the time had arrived, Luisa lay down in the beautiful, soft, new and very wide matrimonial bed. But who did not come to share that soft bed with her was Juvencio, her newly-acquired spouse.

That this night passed like any other one confused her and quite some. She had been told and had heard that there prevails a noticeable difference in being married and in not being married, a difference which, in part, owing to circumstance resting in the fields of psychology as well as in those of physiology can be agreeable, also useful to health and general well-being and, in part, can also be disagreeable, embarrassing, difficult, unsatisfactory, undesirable, boring, repulsive, tiring, refreshing or just turn out a matter of duty.

Luisa, however, had no opportunity to find out, through personal experience, in what manner and form the difference between being married and not being married operated. Because during the following night she also remained alone.

Now she became seriously alarmed.

Much as she wanted to she could not fall asleep. Restlessly she rolled and tossed around in her cosy and so very, very wide bed.

It happened the following day, in the afternoon.

Don Juvencio had been out in the fields since shortly after sunrise and by noon returned for lunch. The meal was over and now he rested in a rocking-chair on the back porch of the large house. By his side, on a small table, was the newspaper which he had been leafing without much interest.

On the same porch, some four yards from him, Luisa was resting in a hammock, a soft pillow under her head, reading a book. Since she had come to the ranch she had not remained idle. She had taken her due part of all work that concerned her—the installation, the necessary alterations, the general supervision and running of the household. It was therefore nothing singular or out of the ordinary that now, after the noon meal, she should be resting comfortably in a hammock.

Since their arrival they had talked but little to each other. It seemed that both were reconnoitring the firmness of their ground so as to know in what channels their conversation was to run without spilling over. At any rate, this home did not echo the perhaps honeyed but generally idiotic conversation which young married couples seem to be in the habit of exchanging during the first week or two.

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The reason why no real conversation got going between the two seemed to rest exclusively on the husband. He evidently did not have the intention of provoking, right during the first week, one of those devastating tempests if he decently could avoid it. But Luisa, with the fine sensitivity of the female mind, felt that something was brewing somewhere in Denmark. That he had avoided her during several consecutive nights, as if she were nothing but a passing guest on a short visit, was too strange not to cause her to ponder deeply over it.

The day before, when breakfast was brought into the dining room, he had asked, "Where's the coffee?"

"Ask Anita, I'm not your servant," she had replied coolly.

So he had stepped into the kitchen, brought the coffee himself and put it on the table without losing a word over the incident. Later on, she had made a terrific scene in the kitchen over the matter with Anita; but the servant had excused herself, saying that the master always wanted the coffee boiling hot and that she had been in the habit of bringing it to the table not until he had eaten his eggs, and if the master now wanted it differently he should have told her so, since it was impossible for her to guess his changing ideas. "Forget the whole thing, Anita; my fault," Luisa said, and with these words the incident was closed.

It was a hot, humid, early afternoon. Though the entire length and width of the porch had a wide overlapping roof providing it with a cosy shade, it was beset, as was the grass-covered, ample patio, by a massive, immovable heat which made the air simmer and which was bearable only if one rested perfectly still in a rocking-chair or swung softly in a hammock, without thinking any more than necessary to distinguish oneself from an animal. Even the domestic animals which happened about were drowsing sleepily. They only moved when flies and mosquitoes bothered them more than they were used to.

On the porch, on a swing hanging from one of the roof-beams, a parrot was dreaming lazily, waking up occasionally, shouting or mumbling some incoherent phrases and returning happily to his apathy when nobody answered him.

On the uppermost step of the short stair which led up to the porch, a cat was fast asleep. Well-fed, it was lying almost on its back, the head hanging down from the step. There it rested with that satisfied indifference shared only by those earthly creatures who don't have to worry about the safety of their lives or the regularity of their meals.

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To a huge tree in the patio Juvencio's favourite saddle-horse was tied. A few steps to one side, on the ground, the saddle was lying because Juvencio had decided to ride later in the afternoon to his *trapiche*, his primitive sugar-cane mill.

The horse, a splendid, real noble animal, also was drowsing in the afternoon heat. Its head was drooping inch by inch until the nose touched the few stalks which still remained on the ground. When the head finally descended low enough so that the nose bumped against the stalks, it lifted its head suddenly, opened its eyes wide and realising that nothing of special importance in the world had occurred in the meantime, closed them slowly and the head again began to droop as irresistibly as before.

From his rocking-chair Don Juvencio could review the whole patio. He lifted his arms, stretched himself lightly, yawned, and picked up the paper lying on the table by his side. He gazed at it for a few moments and laid the paper down again.

He now looked at the parrot which was drowsily perching on its swing ten feet from him. While thus staring at the bird there came to his mind a story written by a certain Count Lucanor in the thirteenth century and at the time when the Arabs occupied Spain and the Spaniards were deeply influenced by the Arabian way of living. Professor Don Raimundo Sanchez, Juvencio's teacher in advanced Castellano at *la escuela secundaria*, had presented that story to explain with its help the curious morphological process certain verbs had undergone during the past seven hundred years. Juvencio thought to himself if the incidents of that particular story had the wanted effect upon a situation similar to the one he was confronted with at present, why, if the story told the truth at all, it should even today have the same result as it had seven hundred years ago.

And so still keeping his mind on that story he gazed hard at the parrot and hollered in a commanding voice: "Hey you, *loro*, hurry to the kitchen and fetch me a pot of hot coffee and a cup, I'm awfully thirsty, you hear?"

The parrot, awakened by the words from its somnolence, scratched its neck with one of its claws, moved slightly to one side on its swing and tried to resume its interrupted nap.

Don Juvencio holding his eyes more sternly now on the parrot yelled: "So, *loro*, living and eating in my house, and you refuse to obey and won't do what you were told to—I'll teach you a lesson and right now."

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He moved his hand backwards, drew his gun from the holster, took aim at the parrot and shot. Feathers flew into the air, the parrot made a croaking noise, it tumbled, tried to get a grip with its claws, but the claws opened, and it fell to the floor of the porch, beating its wings twice, and was dead.

Juvencio placed the gun on the table, after swinging it a few times in his hand, as if testing its equilibrium.

He now looked at the cat which was so fast asleep that it did not even purr.

"*Gato*," Juvencio called out, "hey, you, go and fetch me a pot of hot coffee from the kitchen. I'm thirsty."

Luisa had leisurely turned towards her husband when he addressed the parrot. What he said to the bird she interpreted as if he were joking with it and she paid no further attention. But when she heard the shot she rolled around in her hammock and raised her head slightly.

She then saw the parrot fall from its swing and she realised that Juvencio had shot it.

"Ay, no," she muttered in a low voice, "*ridículo*."

When Juvencio now called the cat, Luisa in her hammock asked quietly, "Why don't you tell Anita to bring you the coffee?"

"If I want Anita to bring me the coffee I holler to Anita and if I want the cat to bring me the coffee I order the cat to do it."

"As you like," Luisa replied and snuggled back into her cosy Yucatán pallet.

"Hey, cat, haven't you heard what I told you to do?" Don Juvencio repeated now, rather loud.

The cat continued to sleep with the absolute certainty that all cats, as long as there exist human beings, have an unquestionable right to receive their maintenance without in turn having to compensate for it with any useful work.

Don Juvencio, however, had other ideas relative to the duties of a cat living on his ranch. When the cat did not stir to get the coffee from the kitchen he said, "So, you don't obey my orders here, do you? All right, I'll teach you a lesson."

He again raised his gun, took aim and fired. The cat attempted to jump, but broke down, rolled over once and was dead.

"Belario!" Juvencio now shouted across the patio.

"*Sí, patrón, vuelo*," came the voice of the *mozo* from one of the corners of the patio. "*Aquí estoy, a sus órdenes, patrón*."

When the boy stood on the lowest step of the stairs, hat in

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hand, Don Juvencio ordered him: "Untie the horse and bring it here."

"Shall I saddle it?"

"No, Belario, I'll tell you when I want it saddled."

"*Sí, patrón, como usted ordene.*"

The *mozo* led the horse close to the stairway and went away.

For a while the horse stood in front of the porch. Don Juvencio looked at the animal as only a man who has to rely on good mounts can look at a horse and who feels as closely linked to it as to an intimate and tried friend.

Several times the horse scratched the ground and, perceiving that its services were not required, started, with mincing steps, back to the shade of the tree.

"*Ola, caballo,*" Don Juvencio called back the horse which by now had crossed the patio about halfway, "trot quickly into the kitchen and bring me a pot of hot coffee and a cup, I'm thirsty."

At the call of *caballo* the horse turned around because it knew its master's voice and it was in the habit of heeding his call. But when it noticed that Juvencio did not rise and did not step into the patio it knew that its master neither meant to fondle nor to saddle it. It therefore continued in the direction of the shady tree.

"Now it seems to me that you've gone completely crazy, *enteramente loco*," Luisa blurted out from her hammock in a tone that had a ring partly of astonishment, partly of growing fury.

"Crazy? I?" replied Juvencio. "I don't know why. This is my horse and this horse is living on my ranch and I order the horses on my ranch whatever suits me, just as you may order your servants whatever pleases you."

"*Bueno, como tu quieras.*" Luisa's eyes returned to the book in her hands.

"*Caballo!*" Don Juvencio shouted again across the patio, "where's the coffee? Why the hell haven't you gone to get it as you've been told, hey?"

Hearing the well-known voice the horse once more turned its head for a moment and when again it saw that the master did not move it continued in the former direction towards the tree.

Don Juvencio lifted the gun, placed his elbow on the table to have a steadier hand, took aim and fired.

The horse trembled all over, stood for about a full minute

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perfectly still on the same spot, commenced to shake violently and suddenly dropped down as if struck by lightning.

"Thoroughly insane! Such a beautiful animal! Have you gone mad?" Luisa yelled.

She was all fury. With absolute certainty the first heavy battle could now be expected, exactly the explosion of which Don Juvencio had received warnings from everybody. Had one of Juvencio's friends been present at this moment he would have galloped into town as fast as he could to get an ambulance and reserve a bed at the hospital.

Luisa threw the book she had been reading down with such violence that some of its leaves were flying off into the air. She breathed heavily, commenced to simmer inside and was just about to boil over when Juvencio slowly turned his rocking-chair around in such a way that he was now facing her.

He did not put away his gun, only swung it up and down for a few times, examined the cylinder, blew at the polished barrel and rubbed it nonchalantly on his shirt sleeve.

And at the very instant when Luisa was about to jump from her hammock to convert herself into a tigress, Don Juvencio said, in a deadly calm voice, but low and distinctly giving every word its full value: "Get up you, woman, and fetch me a pot of hot coffee from the kitchen and a cup, I'm thirsty. Hurry!"

While he said so he held his eyes low but now he looked up, gazing straight and coldly at her, raising his gun slightly inch by inch, finally aiming it straight at her body.

She caught that gesture just as she was about to jump out of the hammock. She, however, did not jump, but slid down from the hammock very slowly, almost automatically.

Now, pale as death, she opened her eyes wide and, after swallowing hard, she said, "*Ahorita*, Juvencio, at once!"

Less than fifteen seconds later, when Luisa had placed the coffee in front of him on the table, he took it in the attitude of a man before whom the waitress in the restaurant places every day his coffee, as indifferent to it as to the price of the printer's ink of the newspaper which he is reading.

Briefly he said, "*Gracias*," slowly drank his coffee and continued to read the paper where he had left off when he had felt thirsty for the first time, ordering the parrot to the kitchen.

"Belario," he now shouted across the patio, "saddle El Prieto, I'm going to ride down to the *trapiche* to see how the *muchachos* are doing."

When the saddled horse stood in front of the stairs, Juvencio

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got up, slid his gun back into the holster, crossed over to the horse and patted its neck affectionately.

Luisa did not return to the hammock, even seemed to have forgotten what chairs were for. She stood there as if petrified.

It looked as if she would require hours, perhaps days to understand clearly what had happened. That, in those few minutes, her character had been changed completely: she had lost all consciousness of her own self, and acquired a feeling as if no relation existed any more with her former self, that she understood in full only many months later. For the moment she stood there like somebody expecting orders and on the jump to execute those orders with lightning speed.

Before mounting his horse Don Juvencio turned around, looked at the leaves of the book strewn about the floor and said, with a light amiable tone, "Licho, pick up that book, day after tomorrow I'll take it to town and have it fixed again."

While he was riding away she bent down and, sliding about on her knees, picked up the leaves.

The amiable name of Licha instead of Luisa he had not used since that evening when she had bashed his head. So when now he called her Licha and ordered her softly to pick up the leaves, in a tone which let her feel the unspoken, but very evident word of "please," all that combined made her understand that Juvencio knew more about practical, applied psychology than she had ever learned at school. And it so happened that, under the impression of these few, typhonically lived minutes, her character suffered another profound transformation. This second metamorphosis gave her suddenly, as if through a nervous shock, a feeling which, never before in her life, she had felt. Something like an irresistible longing, an ardent desire got hold of her existence, a hunger which only could be stilled by Juvencio being with her.

During supper neither of the two talked.

Luisa had gone to bed and a well-calculated while after, Juvencio knocked on her door.

"*Adelante!*" Luisa said excitedly, almost yelling.

Juvencio entered.

He sat down on the edge of the soft and wide bed and played fondlingly with her hair.

"You know, Licha, you've got very pretty hair."

"You like it, Vencho?"

"Very much."

After a few minutes he asked, "Licha, who gives the orders around this house?"

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"Why, you, of course, Vencho," she replied in deep earnest and snuggled back into the pillows.

"You, and you only!"

Three hours later she had acquired another experience, one entirely new to her and that was, that even though at times it is not apparent in a marriage who actually gives the orders, once man and woman are in bed together the question of who gives the order and who has to obey is not discussed, because it does not exist as long as the laws of nature are not modified by superior command. Because, at this place and in that particular situation satisfactory results can only be obtained if the man orders and the woman submits herself willingly and expectingly to those orders. And, furthermore, it may be assumed with absolute certainty that, if in a marriage the woman gives the orders, it is only because the man lacks the power of giving orders in bed with a voice so strong that the woman cannot but obey and in so doing admit that she is the submissive part.

In spite of this new experience, acquired during that night, Luisa could not go to sleep as rapidly as one might have expected considering the circumstances, because she was plagued by a question.

Since women rarely can leave alone a matter which, in itself, is of no great importance for life in general, Luisa finally made up her mind to put the question and get rid for ever after of all doubts on a matter very particular to her.

"Vencho," she said cooingly, "would you really have shot me, if I had not brought you the coffee? Would you have been able to do that to me who loves you so very, very much?"

Juvencio, considerably less bothered by such doubts, had already been three-quarters asleep when the question brought him back to earth.

In an absolutely indifferent, cold and utterly calm voice he replied, "Now, don't you make a mistake, woman, I most surely would've shot you and I would've shot you faster and easier than I shot my horse, believe you me, by God I swear. For shooting you I surely would have been sentenced to death and surely fusillated and that would have been the end of it. But as for my adored and beloved horse I'll have to search far and wide before I may find another one like that wonderful, faithful and noble animal which I had to sacrifice for no other reason but to show you how deadly serious I actually was. *Buenas noches, hasta mañana*, goodnight!" ©

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THE MAD MAD WORLD OF MOVIES

FILMING is by far the most fantastic, the most demanding side of the entire show business razzmatazz. An actor hoping to emerge from it sane and sound needs to give it his full attention, undivided.

For one thing, it's completely crazy. Lunatic. Daily the boys in the front-office achieve marvels of organisation and planning that make the Normandy D-Day landings seem a choir-treat outing by comparison. But film-making as seen by the actor in the studio is a mad, mad world. The end of his film is shot first; the beginning last. Half a sentence may be acted on location in Bermuda (as happened to me once); the other half six weeks later at Shepperton. He has to dash to the studio at crack of dawn to be made up, put on his costume—and hang around until five in the afternoon for a three-second take. Westerns are made in Spain. Probably—I wouldn't be the least surprised—Spanish films are made out West.

Anyone venturing into this cloud-cuckoo realm (which I admit I adore thoroughly; every fabulous foot and frame of it) must expect to be bewitched . . . bothered . . . and bewildered.

Mind you, the actual filming isn't so bad. Studios have a commendable BOAC complex. They take good care of you, because if you get mauled by a man-eater, or chopped by a chariot, your scenes might have to be reshot with a replacement. This can be hideously expensive.

No; the difficulties lie in other directions—like stepping through the looking-glass and getting into films in the first place.

How *do* you get into films?

For girls, it can be a push-over. A luscious lass with no experience whatever may be parading the prom at a film

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No-one is better fixed to give the lowdown on films than Kenneth More. Here, from his recent book, is his not-too-serious view of some of the pitfalls from the other side of the camera

& Me by KENNETH MORE

festival resort; next thing she knows, she has been signed for a remake of *The Maid of the Mountains.* An actor on the other hand must be tough and brace himself for disappointments. I quote the celebrated case of David Niven who, incredibly, couldn't break into films at all during his early days in Hollywood. He worked as a barman. He became a fishing-boat deckhand. He went to film-folk parties by the score, but drew blanks as far as work was concerned until the Royal Navy cruiser *Norfolk* steamed into Californian waters on a goodwill trip.

Sam Goldwyn and other top brass of the film colony were asked to a special dinner on board—and David Niven managed to wangle an invitation.

He was a colossal success; a charming, spellbinding *raconteur.* Then the pinnace for taking the guests ashore came alongside. It was crowded.

"Don't worry about me," said Niven cheerily. "I'll walk."

And with that, he stepped over the side of the cruiser, as if leaving a Bond Street kerb to hail a taxi, and swam to the beach.

A few days later Goldwyn sent him a contract.

Long ago, of course, right in the early days of films, when the M-G-M lion was but a cub, studios twigged that stories like this are meat and drink to journalists; a goldmine of free publicity. Hence the shock-troops of breathtakingly high-pressure publicity men whom studios employ. Very talented they are. Geniuses at their job. Nimble brains. Ideas by the million.

But watch out... Some have been known to take the line that any publicity is good publicity. On the other hand...

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I disagree. To give your name to an item of food can be an excellent wheeze. Melba is still the toast of the very best dining tables. But an actress having a flower, for example, named after her needs to take care. A delectable star of the screen, after cooing with delight at the naming ceremony, can have the bloom, as you might say, taken off her pleasure when she finds herself described in the grower's catalogue as "a vigorous climber, inclined to fade early, and a free and easy bedder."

Generally speaking, the four Ps (for Peril) in film publicity are:

Premières
Personal Appearances
Press Conferences
Publicity Stunts

PREMIERES: Gimmicks galore. Buckets of champagne. Lots of lovely girls with figures you can only describe with your hands.

These affairs are field-days for the Press lads—or, rather, field-nights. The later timing is said to date, by police request, from the sensational afternoon Diana Dors jammed the streets of London solid by driving to one of her premières in her open turquoise Cadillac.

An actor worried about the safety of his life, limb and one and only dinner jacket, can take comfort in the fact that the average English première entails no danger other than being crushed underfoot by a stampede on its way for a glimpse of someone else. At the première for *The Robe* in the Lebanon, everyone danced, offered prayers for the continued wellbeing of CinemaScope, and had blood splashed all over the place from a sacrificial lamb that was slaughtered in the foyer.

The première of Howard Hughes' *Underwater!* was held in the most logical spot to a publicity man's way of thinking—the bottom of a swimming pool.

("Swimming room only. Collect your diving gear at the poolside, please.")

But the most terrible hazard of premières is the heartbreak of finding yourself lost. You get auditioned for a part in the film; your agent fights for a contract for you, comma by comma; you spend weeks on location and weeks in the studios. At last comes the first public showing. You describe to your friends your wonderful performance. Bursting with pride, along you go with your loved ones to admire yourself on the

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screen. And then you watch . . . and watch . . . and watch.

And gradually the ghastly realisation comes over you that probably even when the director saw the rushes, he made a mental note to cut out all your scenes. Snip, snip, snip—and your performance lay in curls on the cutting-room floor.

The only thing to do is to make a side-exit, giving to anyone who dares ask: "Where *were* you in the film?" the sort of look which blisters paint.

PERSONAL APPEARANCES:

Be warned—if a bathing beauty queen contest has twenty entrants, assembled into a line-up as plum and leggy as a butcher's poultry-counter at Christmas, only one of these gorgeous creatures can have First Prize. This means that nineteen others will hate you for the rest of their days.

And remember—Hell hath no fury like the mother whose child fails to get First Prize in a baby show. Donald Sinden once discovered this. Also, he discovered, on his way home from a fête, at which teenagers had paid to be photographed with him, that people were sniggering and smirking.

His face was streaked with lipstick.

On another occasion, Sinden was invited to speak to university students on "The Theatre and Films." When asked for questions, the students pounced joyfully.

One of them asked, "How do you compare the northern and southern dramas of the Chinese theatre during the Mongol epoch?"

Avoid the picture-mad publicity man who dumps a boa constrictor in your arms . . .

PRESS CONFERENCES:

A survival of the fittest and wittiest. I admire tremendously stars like Hermione Gingold. Who else can step off the boat-train at Waterloo, holding a bird cage, and gurgle excitedly to waiting reporters and cameramen, "Ah! Just in time for Outsize Coat Week at Derry and Toms!"

The picture-mad publicity man who hands you a mountain lion on a gold chain, or dumps a boa constrictor into your

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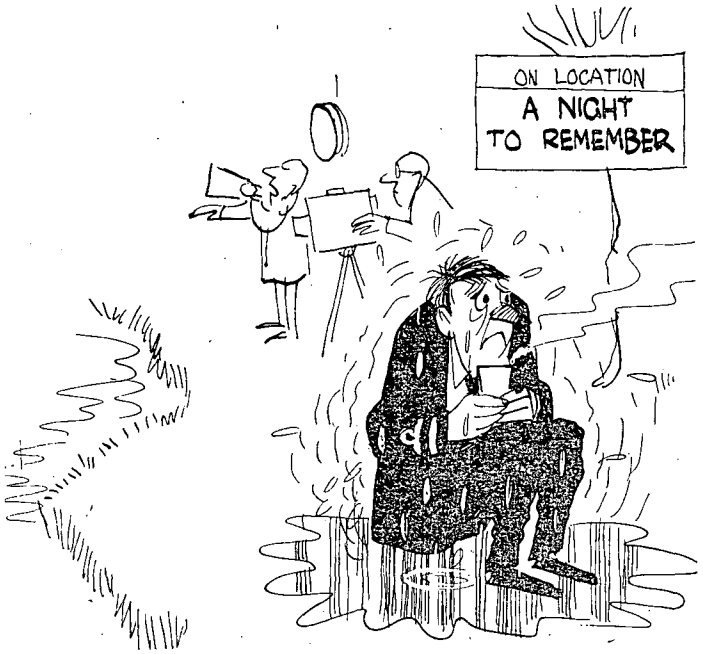
arms, just as you are about to enter a Press conference, needs to be avoided.

So does the type of reporter who begins interviews by looking you straight between the eyes and saying, "Now just tell me, as an outsider, what do you think of the human race?"

A favourite top-scorer of mine in the silly-questions game is Sophie Tucker. Asked by one reporter, "To what do you attribute your age?" the Red Hot Momma shot back, "Breathing."

PUBLICITY STUNTS: Hard experience, plus his natural instinct for self-preservation, enables an actor to sort these into Good and "Help!" Typical of the first category are:

(a) Arriving tieless for dinner at a restaurant where you



In A Night to Remember, for instance, hundreds of us poor wretches floundered, swam, "drowned" and clung to lifebelts in Ruislip Lido in mid-December at two a.m.

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know perfectly well that the management insists on ties.

(b) Missing your plane at the airport when embarking for location shots.

In the case of (a) you afterwards vanish to a smaller, much less snooty place for a whale of an evening; (b) means that you catch a flight twenty-four hours later and enjoy another day off work.

As far as the second category is concerned, have a go at assessing the following stunts for snags:

1. "The moment your plane crashes on the glacier we'll send a rescue team up through the blizzard."

2. "The island certainly has crocodiles, but a tree-house built by the last chap marooned there is probably still standing."

3. "Our lawyers are almost certain that the right of way for the railway line doesn't extend farther than your dining room."

4. "When we've tied a label round your neck and stuck stamps on your forehead, the GPO will be forced to accept you as a parcel."

5. "Here's a sketch-plan of the pothole. Wait on this ledge overhanging the underground stream and we'll come and find you."

6. "By the time the fire brigade arrives, only the outhouses will have been burned down."

7. "Think of the serial rights, old chap! The first single-handed crossing of the Atlantic by canoe!"

This now leaves two further film-type risks which particularly deserve mention. One is the Epic, which can sometimes mean an extravagant, exotic 20th century safari that's exceedingly pleasant. The epic, though, controlled by a producer who is a stickler for historical accuracy, can be far from exotic and desperately unpleasant. In order to sink the *Titanic* well and truly in *A Night to Remember*, for instance, hundreds of us poor wretches floundered about, swam, "drowned" and clung to lifebelts in Ruislip Lido in mid-December at the horrific hour of 2 a.m.

Peter Cushing, filming *The Black Knight* in Spain, nearly crucified himself in the sacred cause of historical accuracy. The saddle of his horse was agonisingly uncomfortable; a sharp-pointed horn stuck into his behind at every movement. Nevertheless, feeling conscientiously in period, he galloped around bravely for days in boiling hot, tropical temperatures,

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wearing chainmail, a metal helmet and breastplate, and flourishing a whacking great sword.

Not until later, when it was all over, did he discover that the saddle had been accidentally strapped on the horse back to front.

Incidentally, the vast hordes of extras needed in such epics are notorious for raising producers' blood-pressures to dangerously near bursting-point. When desert scenes for the film version of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* were being shot, the big, coloured shields of the Egyptian soldiers began to disappear. They went, one by one. Nobody was stealing them; nobody was using them for dustbin lids. They were being eaten.

They were of *papier mâché*, made with a kind of glue that tickled the Egyptians' palates.

Delicious.

Then there is the gigantic problem of communication: marshalling the extras for triumphal entries, processions, battles and the like. The astoundingly perfect co-ordination at the Battle of Austerlitz in King Vidor's mammoth *War and Peace* was achieved, so I'm told, with the help of walkie-talkie radios.

Much more haphazardly organised was the storming of the Bastille in the great Antoinette epic, *Marie, Marie Quite Contrary*.

There were four thousand extras. The peasants threw themselves at the gates, then up came the artillery. Drums played. Bugles called. Prisoners cheered, flags were waved. The Bastille blazed like a furnace.

Only when mere ashes were left, "corpses" lay everywhere and everybody was utterly whacked, did a terrible calm settle on the set, broken by the *crunch-crunch* of the producer grinding his teeth to powder.

None of it had been recorded. Not an inch of film had been in any of the cameras. Nobody was ready. Some raving idiot, some unspeakably stupid clot of a peasant, had given the signal prematurely, and exploded the entire works too soon, by innocently waving a handkerchief at a girlfriend he happened to see on the battlements.

As he explained: "How was I to know?"

A friend of mine said precisely the same thing after a memorable session of the unarmed combat which is sometimes involved when dealing with the second item in this final group of filming risks.

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I refer to leading ladies.

Let me state at once that all the leading ladies with whom I've ever had the honour to work have been wholly delightful. They've been brilliantly talented, unfailingly patient, cheerful and easy to get on with. I only wish this paragraph could be printed in fluorescent ink as a glowing tribute to their charms.

But my friend was landed with an absolute tartar. She was as popular on the set as a flag-day seller on the Ile du Levant. Even so, my friend realised that nothing is more vital to an actor's happiness, peace of mind and career in general than staying on the right side of his leading lady; therefore he did everything possible to keep her sweet. He sent her flowers, telegrams of good wishes, expensive chocolates. When he met her he kissed her hand, her wrist and her arms, as if he were nibbling corn on the cob.

He even organised a magnificent party to celebrate her birthday. He had scores of influential guests. Superb food. Flashlight photographers hid in the shrubbery. In short, it was a lulu of a do. And for the *pièce de résistance* he told his Chinese cook to bake a wonderful cake.

It didn't have any candles—my friend was thankful he'd remembered to give strict instructions on that point—but otherwise it was a masterpiece of culinary confection. The great lady herself cut it with impressive ceremony. Then, by an appalling twist of fate, she asked the cook what the Chinese inscriptions in icing meant. The cook told her.

Only when my friend had been dragged out of the ornamental goldfish pond, his jacket in shreds, his hair, eyes and ears clogged with marzipan and butter-sponge, did he himself find out the answer.

Translated, they read: *Happy Change Of Life.*

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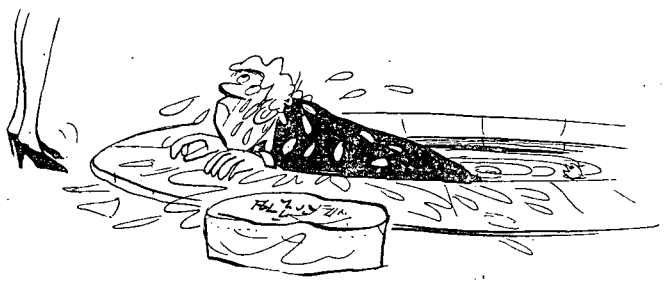

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GOADING of OLAF

by Armstrong King

IT IS a legend now, told in pubs and squinted at through beer; and whenever the sun splits across Konimooloo Inlet and lifts the paint from weatherboards men still brawl about it, fighting barefist even, and thumping each other in the dust.

He came from Denmark, or Norway, or somewhere—his name was Olaf. He was taller and bigger than any man in Konimooloo, ugly, a bony monstrosity of a man; a simpleton.

"Dat is a svine, and dat is a svine!" he used to curse. Everything was a swine, and everybody hated him for a stranger.

Olaf rented a shack from Nellie Cross. Poor Nellie! She kept Konimooloo post office and had done so for years. All she had ever done through the years was serve stamps and look out across the dust of the unmade road, through the gum leaves fingering the blue of heaven and down upon the inlet where Sanderson Creek struck the ocean.

Everybody scoffed at her. Olaf didn't. He courted her and married her. He took her in wedlock despite her wrinkled face, her grey hair and her overwhelming puritanism. He bawled at her in protestations of love; baring his chest and smashing at the saplings on her property, ripping down the broken shack in which he had slept, and digging like a wild man at soil that had never been dug before.

Nellie stood now erect behind her post-office grille pushing stamps across the counter and flinging the change at her customers—"A couple of ratbags together," was the general opinion.

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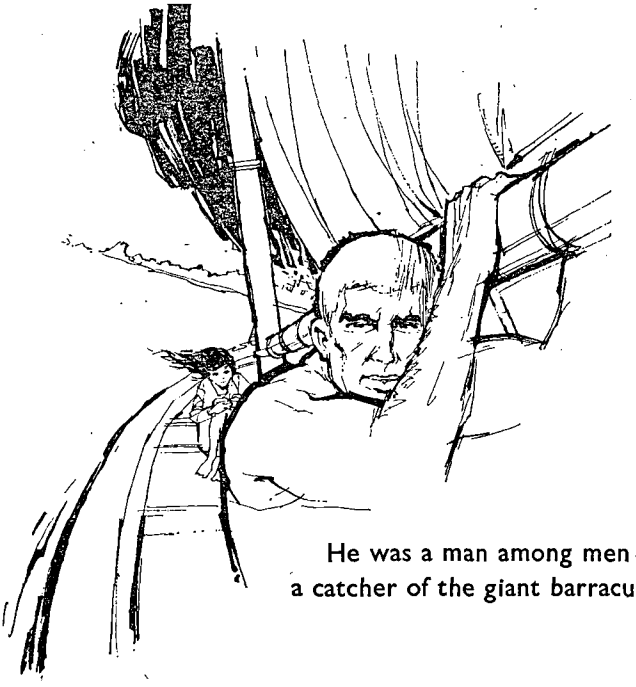

He was a man among men—
a catcher of the giant barracuda

And even the crews of fishing boats putting out of Konimooloo Inlet, who never concerned themselves with local gossip, looked up from the beach, along the dust track towards the post office beyond the runted township. And from the post office Olaf looked down to the landing and the arched and wasted rocks upon which the ocean was for ever pounding.

"Von day, my Nellie," he bawled, snatching her up in his giant arms, "von day you will buy for me a boat. Yes?"

So Nellie emptied her own bank book over her own counter; she poured twenty years of loneliness, boredom and lovelessness into a little leather bag and bade him buy on deposit the *Olive-May*, a twenty-footer rotten with age, with a ragged sail and a rusty engine. Then he laboured like a fool, dragging, prising, throwing himself at the boat until it was clear of the water, and then for days on end he scraped

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and sanded and painted. The temperature rose to a hundred in the shade, but he stopped for neither drink nor rest nor word.

Nellie loved him with an enduring love and, although she was fifteen years older than he, she smiled for him through her leather face. And then, soon, at that last moment before her fertility was exhausted, she gave birth to a baby—small and beautiful and as sharp as the sunlight over Konimooloo Inlet.

Now more than ever they called him ratbag, for this was before the present immigration and whosoever toiled in the sun was sure to get on and earn the disapprobation of honest men.

From this time on he began to push out of the inlet setting his brown sail against the wind, bawling with angry joy at the sun and the sea, and veering round behind arched and towering Chapel Rock to the foot of the cliffs where no-one dared to fish. There he struggled in delighted fury all and every day, hauling in barracuda as long and as black as eels; holding them crippled in his ugly hand and laughing into their snapping teeth, daring them, spitting at them and then cracking their skulls on the gunwale of his boat.

And for this he got money; more money than any other fisherman working out of Konimooloo Inlet.

"Yes, that cow'll get on. One of these days he'll smash his flaming boat on the cliff bottom and that'll be that."

Nellie's girl, Annie, grew; first in months and then in years until she was the most beautiful two-year-old in Konimooloo. Olaf did not smash the *Olive-May* on the cliffs; he impoverished no fishing ground and he came to no grief.

"Dat is a *svine*!" he used to shout at the cliffs and the sea and the rising land above the inlet.

And nobody came in contact with little Annie, so precious was she and so adored; so loved and so protected—the last, after which there could be no more.

Now, for the first time he ventured into Konimooloo pub and stood in his singlet, lolling like the others and snatching at his beer with thirst and greed; hurling his money down, talking when others didn't and answering when they did.

But they shunned him, holding him for presumptuous. They dropped their lips in aversion; stand-offish, ill at ease. Nobody slapped his back, nobody called him "Ole." Nobody said, "She's a stinker today. Have a beer." Nobody said: "Good on yeh, mate."

But Olaf made of presumption a virtue, bawling at them

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through the silence and praising the size and number of his barracuda. "Von spot!" he yelled, and his face lit up and the pots in his belly frothed inwardly. "Von spot for barracuda." And he used to crash his empty pot down on the bar top.

Berndy Willis rolled over sideways in a circular motion pivoting on his ribs. "Garn," he said, "there ain't no place along this here coast where barracuda lie thick like you say—if there was some joker'd have had 'em on ice by now."

Olaf moved his knobby face and was about to say something when his manner changed. "Svagmen and vowsers—dat's what you are and you don't believe because you not game."

Then they crowded him, sweating in the afternoon heat, piqued and provoked, intent upon decision. "Good—you got the flaming possy; you got the lot—where is it then?"

Olaf laughed in their faces and spat backwards over his shoulders. "Dat big!" and he stretched his arm bones under skin black with suntan. "Every von—dat big."

Then he was gone floundering through the dust, staggering from one side of the track to the other. Berndy Willis sniffed through one nostril and called for beer . . .

Once, when they had mentioned little Annie, Olaf said, "The God gives and the God takes away." But that was inappropriate, out of place in Konimooloo. So they ignored him, embarrassed as they were with such talk.

A week later the whole of Konimooloo was talking—it was poor Nellie—Nellie of all people! She'd been to Melbourne with her kid.

"She's not had foot out of Konimooloo in twenty years," they marvelled. Nobody could rest; yet nobody would stand up straight and challenge her: "Nellie, what were you doing down Melbourne last week?"

"It's none of our business," they pretended, on tenterhooks.

But Melbourne or no Melbourne, Olaf was running his boat before the northerly, turning her over almost in the swell, and hooking barracuda when nobody could.

"Good on 'im," they scoffed in mock indifference. "He'll get on!"

Then Olaf got drunk, drunker than ever before. So they set out to trap him.

"Olaf," they bluffed, "we know where you hook that

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'cuda." And they tailed him back to Nellie's post office, taunting him for a foreigner, hopeful for words spilled in anger.

But Olaf slept like a pig in drunkenness and they got nothing out of him. And Nellie praised him; a man among men, husband and father—and a catcher of barracuda.

"He looks like a flaming 'cuda," they swore, finding nothing better to say.

Nellie looked at little Annie golden in the sun; "Is *that* a barracuda?" she gloated, secure, inviolate—a wrinkled pod that had cast a glossy bean.

And that winter the rain filled Nellie's block with scrub again, and it left her weatherboards half painted, a blaze of red-lead against the crowding gums.

"What's up? Given it away?" they jibed, glad now of any gossip; spiteful.

But Olaf doubled his face non-committally and slithered off through the orange mud down to the landing as though he could love nothing apart from the *Olive-May*.

So they condemned him for a foreigner again, foreseeing disaster; half-expecting, half-hoping for condemnatory intervention.

It rained that spring; not storm rain, but persistent rain from August to November that kept Konimooloo a spongy bog out of which sprang thick, green stalks of vegetation, succulent, snapping to the foot; and floating everything in a deep-green haze.

"A month of hot weather," they said, watching the vegetation as though it was an enemy, "and she'll go up like a cracker."

The sun came out in November, and the weather came in hot and heavy; and the hillsides stank of greenness.

"One month," they warned each other.

Then the greenness changed to brownness and the hills smelled hot and dry. And voices died in Konimooloo lest the brownness change to redness.

"No," they said decisively, "never seen the like of it."

And the sun burnt throughout December into January—"Dat big!" Olaf bragged. And sure enough he brought barracuda in that summer the likes of which nobody had seen before.

"Good on you, mate," they snapped back, angry now and anxious, watching the yellowing sky.

And they lost patience in Konimooloo when Nellie protected

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her child from the undying sun and shielded her in gauze from the ever-gathering dust.

Then the heat burst up out of the Centre, exploding southward in red dust. Every living thing stood crippled by wind under a sky layered dark with trailing smoke. Then bushfire struck Konimooloo, scorching families out of their homes and scattering them in limping groups. Then, at that moment, Olaf put out into the ocean with little Annie, keeling before burning wind, bellowing; hooking giant barracuda and snapping their backs over his knee. And those who saw him—and some did, being driven to the sea by fire—believed he was drunk.

And when the fire blasted up Bett's Gully, reaching out and taking the post office—or just before that—Nellie was seen stepping out into the cinders as though it were any day and not the day fire came through Konimooloo.

So the men of Konimooloo fought the fire with their hands; baffling it and bringing it to a standstill and deeming it natural to do so. They fought till they dropped and others took their place. They fought the fire through the day and through the night, but they killed it. They killed it dead and stood over its body triumphant. Everybody fought—but not so Olaf. Not so even though the post office among the gums was partly destroyed. And that was sin.

"No," they averred through the soot of their faces. "No. We'll put up with a lot, but not that."

And that was the end of Olaf.

"Too right it is," they finalised. "A bludger who can't do his fair whack don't belong here."

Even Nellie saw that, but she kept it to herself, turning her back upon scandal, finding cause and reason for all things. "Olaf's all right," she defended, and nobody got further than that.

So they rebuilt Konimooloo on insurance money; and within months there might never have been a fire. Olaf sailed the *Olive-May* and caught bigger barracuda than ever. And through the summer days of the following year he took little Annie with him, sometimes to catch the wind and the sunshine, and sometimes to sleep quietly in the sea air under the half-furled sails of the stranded boat.

But he was done for—never a word, never a smile. "The sooner the cow gets out of Konimooloo the better."

In the pub they talked of firing his house, but that was the beer talking and nothing more.

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Olaf's offence became the only topic of conversation in Konimooloo. And because they could do nothing else, they set the township kids on to Olaf, granting dispensation from blame and sitting back to watch the fun.

Children, abhorrent now and egged on by adults, unchecked, rampant, waylaid Olaf and dogged his steps, assailing him with parents' tellings and slavering school-learned insolence.

Sometimes Olaf turned and swept them bundle-wise into his great arms; and sometimes he belched in their faces, scattering them like shoaling fish sheering off sideways. But for the most part he ignored them, comparing them with his little Annie who slept sound, shaded from the summer sun in the *Olive-May*.

Then they stole his pilchards bought for bait, or seized his white-painted corks which he used for fishing-floats and cast them into the surf beyond the rocks. No-one took it amiss, no-one called a halt. The goading of Olaf became a sort of generalised sport, legitimate, fair and justified.

Then they stoned his chooks and stole their eggs, cracking them in spite; they hobbled his cow and they brayed his dog. They peppered his iron roof with gravel until he was driven out of the house.

They taffled his lines and blunted his hooks. They watered his petrol and loosened his tiller. It was all fine and magnificent, a never-ending source of amusement.

"But not my Annie," Olaf stipulated. "Touch von hair of her head and I break your flaming necks." And Konimooloo read the look in his eyes, noted well and left little Annie in peace.

But nobody could rile him. Nobody could master him. And nobody could hook barracuda like him; and nothing could staunch his boasting.

Poor Nellie used to sit behind her post-office grille with slander in her eyes and hatred in her heart.

"Crack a skull," she advised. "Just one—not more, and that'll settle 'em."

But Olaf drank his beer at the empty end of the bar, talked to the air in case anybody was listening, and never scowled. Not once did he let the bucolic humour pass from his ugly face; never once did his eyes cloud in anger.

"Svagmen and vowsers," he swore occasionally, but there was never acid in his voice.

Then, when this gigantic merriment had risen to its peak and Konimooloo was beaten for new ideas, somebody—not

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everybody, but *somebody*—and they are adamant about this —pushed Olaf's standing boat out into the current while he sought new bait to replace that stolen by children.

Some claim to have watched the *Olive-May* as she was collected up by the ocean and sucked round aback of Chapel Rock; and some claim they heard, and can still hear, the ocean crushing her against the foot of the cliffs—just as had been prophesied.

Later, Konimooloo watched for floating wreckage. They were chastened now, and downthrown with anguish. So they watched the beating surf sharp-eyed for the body of little Annie which they now knew must be returned to Konimooloo.

"If we had only *known*," they pleaded.

Olaf disappeared and was never heard of again. So now, if you pass through Konimooloo, and if you buy stamps at the old post office, do so kindly, bearing with poor Nellie who sits watching the sea.

And if you talk to her, she'll say, as likely as not—"It's pride that done me. Nobody should have kids so late in life—mine was born with crook lungs. Wood smoke would have killed her. The doctors down Melbourne said just one bushfire..." Then she's sure to wander off. So listen, nod gently and pass quietly by.

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FARE PLAY

If you become a bus driver there are three lovely and very popular games you must learn to play:

1. *Blind Man's Buff*

When you turn right, just signal by showing two millimetres of your fingertips. It is great fun when motorists do not notice and run into your huge bus with their tiny cars.

2. *Hide and Seek*

Whenever you approach a request stop hide behind a large lorry or another bus and when you have almost reached the stop, shoot off at a terrific speed. It is very amusing to see people shake their fists at you. It is ten to one they miss some important business appointment.

3. *Hospital Game*

If you have to stop for one reason or another, never wait until the conductor rings the bell. If you start moving quickly and unexpectedly, and if you are lucky—and in slippery weather you have a very good chance—people will fall on top of one another. This looks extremely funny from the driver's seat...

GEORGE MIKES, *How to be an Alien*

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Pascoe Place

by WILLIAM SCOTT

YOUNG Tippett was sitting in the office on the seafront at Lydmouth, paring his fingernails for something to do on that quiet winter afternoon, when one of the local citizens poked his head in and said, "There's a car parked outside the Pascoe place."

"Oh?"

"Been there quite a time. A big, expensive-looking car."

"Oh?" said Tippett, with mounting interest.

"He's got out a couple of times and had a look around. He's just sitting there now, looking at the place."

Tippett got up. "Thanks. I'll get right up there."

He grabbed his things and left the office, to take the short cut by way of the little sidestreets off the front, across the High Street, then up to the Pascoe place.

There was indeed a car parked there, a Jaguar, standing on the hill down from the main road where the man at the wheel could see over the wall into the property.

"Excuse me, sir. My name's Tippett. Are you interested?"

"I could be."

"Would you like to see over the house?"

The man paused, then nodded. He got out and they went down the hill, past the big *For Sale* sign—APPLY TIPPETT AND SON—to the broad double door in the front wall.

There were more weeds than gravel to be seen on the driveway. The overgrown evergreens in the flowerbeds were crowded in by giant weeds with dried-out stalks and yellowed dead leaves. The grass of

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the lawn, knee high, swayed in the wind. "The garden, of course—" said Tippett.

"Of course."

Then, when the curve in the drive brought them before the house, the man stopped to look up at what was always referred to by the locals as "the Pascoe place," despite the fact that there had not been a Pascoe living there for many years.

The original Pascoe who had built it had intended that it should be the biggest and most impressive house in Lydmouth. It had been in turn the home of his son and grandson, then for a time taken over by an outside family and more recently occupied by a group of young artists whose goings-on had scandalised the townspeople. Their departure had coincided with the drawing-up of a petition to the council by those who had the good name of Lydmouth at heart.

Young Tippett had started to despair of ever getting the place off their books. It was not that it was a Victorian horror. True it had crenellated parapets, mullioned windows and a tower, but apart from that the architect had shown commendable restraint for that period. The overall effect was not displeasing and there was justification for the tower, since from there one could command an excellent view over the Lydmouth rooftops to the little harbour, the beach and the bay beyond. The main trouble was that it was too large by present standards. The huge rooms were too difficult to heat and there were too many of them for the smaller family of today. Also, through the artists' vandalism and then because of disuse, the house had got into a bad state and the purchase price would be only a start to the money one would have to spend to make it habitable.

So Tippett had pricked up his ears when the man told him his name was Ryerson.

"Not John Ryerson?" said Tippett hopefully.

The man nodded.

Tippett felt a sudden surge of excitement. If John Ryerson was interested—*the* John Ryerson—this was really something. He visualised himself pulling off a sale and being able to put a trunk call through to his father, telling him of his triumph while holding the fort at Tippett and Son's during the slow winter months.

"It's centre-hall plan," said Tippett, going into his sales-talk as they got inside. "Dining room on the left, drawing room on the right."

"I know," said Ryerson.

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"You do?"

"I used to live here."

"In this house?"

"Not in this house, but in Lydmouth."

"When was that, Mr. Ryerson?"

"Some time ago now."

"Oh, I see," said Tippett.

Never knew John Ryerson had lived in Lydmouth, he said to himself, as he hurried over to the shutters to let in more light—always thought his was the story of the East End boy who had made good.

He returned to find Ryerson still standing where he had left him, in the centre of the broad hallway, scanning the graceful sweep of the wide, uncarpeted staircase, the high-ceilinged, spacious rooms on either side.

He appeared not to be listening as Tippett went on with more sales-talk. He walked around the ground floor, footsteps echoing through the empty house, across the drawing room to the library, over to the dining room, with no real need of Tippett as an escort.

Mounting the stairs, Tippett debated whether he should go on talking. He might as well shut up, since Ryerson showed no interest in anything he said. But when they had strolled through the upstairs rooms and reached the tower he did venture, "It's certainly a lovely view, isn't it, Mr. Ryerson?"

Ryerson nodded.

"You can probably see where you used to live, from here," said Tippett exploringly.

"Yes."

He added nothing further and Tippett wondered whether this was the usual Ryerson. If so, you'd be at a disadvantage doing business with him. You would never know quite what he was thinking. But perhaps he was standing there silently surveying the town because he was in a nostalgic mood.

When they were downstairs again and Ryerson seemed to have finished his tour of inspection, Tippett felt that he had fallen down on the job. He hadn't got across at all. His father would have handled it so much better.

But when he had closed the shutters and was making for the front door, Ryerson didn't join him. He was standing thoughtfully in the centre of the hall once more, in semi-darkness now, the only light coming from the window at the stair landing.

A last look around before leaving—that was normal enough

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with prospective clients. But this went on, and on. Tippett started to feel redundant, and then rather embarrassed.

"I'll take it," Ryerson said abruptly.

Tippett's heart leapt. He knew that Ryerson by reputation was a man of quick decisions but this was almost too good to be true. He hadn't even asked the price. That was real wealth for you—the sort of man who says, "I'll take this," when other people say, "How much is this?" But this was no trinket. This was a big house that would need a deal of money put into it to fix it up. Surely even a Ryerson mulled such a thing over in his mind.

"We're asking—twenty thousand," said Tippett.

"Twelve thousand, five hundred."

He was no fool, this man. There was no listed price on the Pascoe place. It had started four years before at twenty thousand but twelve thousand five hundred was precisely what it had come down to when last there had been a likely prospect.

"If that offer's satisfactory I'll have my lawyers get in touch with you."

Fifteen thousand flashed through Tippett's mind but he decided against it. He couldn't outbargain Ryerson. He handed him his card.

"I think we can do business on those terms," he said, already framing in his mind the words of triumph to his father on the phone.

Ryerson was no more chatty on their way back to his car.

"You plan to use this as a summer place, Mr. Ryerson?"

"No."

"Treating it as an investment?"

No answer, so Tippett dropped his prying. He had made the sale, wasn't that enough?

Walking back to the office, light of step and smiling happily, he passed the Sloop Inn and wished it was open. He would so much have liked to have gone in, ordered drinks all round and then watched their faces as he casually remarked that he had just sold the Pascoe place.

There was no reason, Ryerson reflected, as he swung the Jaguar into the main road and put his foot down for London, no reason at all why he should have told that young fellow why he had bought the house. They would have enough to gossip about in the town from the mere fact that he had bought it.

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He wondered how many of them would remember him from the days when he had lived in Lydmouth with his aunt. Some might claim to remember, because he was *the* John Ryerson now and thereby they would get some sort of prestige. But he doubted whether anyone really remembered him from those days. He had been but a youth then, had spent less than two years with his aunt, now dead, and it had all been some twenty years ago, anyway.

They probably didn't even know how he had come to be in that area again, unless they read about government building contracts.

He hadn't the whole contract for the project at Wintcombe, along the coast. It was too vast for that. But he had a nice slice of it and it would mean that for three years or so he would have to be going regularly back and forth between London and Wintcombe to keep his eye on the job.

And on each trip he would see the Pascoe place.

You couldn't very well *not* see it. The main coast road ran along the high ground above Lydmouth, took an inward curve just as you reached the Pascoe place and skirted the rear of the property. Keeping your eyes on the road as you came up to the curve, there was the house right in front of you, set among the pines on the sloping ground down to the town. To have looked away to avoid seeing it would have been to drive without due care. It was there, blatantly before you, and there was no evading it.

There was one way, though, that he could avoid having to pass the Pascoe place. There was a turn-off before Lydmouth that could take him inland and around the town. But it would mean that he would have to go beyond Wintcombe and backtrack, adding about half an hour to the journey—a whole hour wasted coming and going from Wintcombe. Also, if he had anyone in the car with him he would be hard put to it to give a logical explanation for this pointless detour. It would be a stupid pandering to his foibles.

He asked himself why he let the sight of that house rankle so much in his mind. Perhaps it was a sign of immaturity, the inability to put the past from your thoughts. Or perhaps it could be that he was pushing himself too hard in his work, getting overwrought from constant tension and letting little things weigh down upon him.

But the fact remained that it did irk him. He came to dread the moment when the house would come into view. Buy the place and pull it down, that was the thing to do.

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It had been towards the end of the war that young John Ryerson had gone to live in Lydmouth. His parents had been killed in the buzz bomb assault on London. He had no-one to turn to but his widowed aunt, who ran a sweets and souvenirs shop on the seafront.

His call-up had been deferred while he settled his father's affairs with the partner in their contracting firm and the war was to end without his being in the forces. There was some money coming to him from the business but his aunt generously insisted that he keep that aside for setting himself up when the war was over. He could earn his keep with her by helping in the shop.

Lydmouth was a quiet wartime backwater. As such, it was a retreat for servicemen and for people subjected to bombing to get away from it all for a while; and also, for those who could arrange matters in such a way, it was a place to sit out the war.

There was a fair amount of business in the summer months and young John made himself more than useful in the shop. He was energetic. He showed initiative about making the most of rationed goods and items that could be picked up off the ration. Customers found him likeable. All in all he was an asset to the shop and his aunt was well pleased with him. When a hot, sunny day came along she was likely to say, "You go off and have a swim, I can manage," and it was on the beach that he first saw Gaye Pascoe.

In the rows of coloured tents set up there, the Pascoes had No. 17, rented for the whole season each year. John had no such luxury. He wore his swimming trunks under his trousers down to the beach.

Gaye Pascoe held court outside No. 17. She was the same age as he was. He knew that, from casual inquiries of his aunt. She was strikingly beautiful. Her deep tan contrasted with her fine white teeth when she laughed and with her glistening blonde hair. She had been born in India, where her father had been in banking before he retired, but the time she had spent out there was not necessarily why she tanned so readily. It did perhaps have something to do with why she seemed accustomed to having things done for her—the abundance of servants in India. She took it for granted the young men around her would fetch and carry for her. And why not? He would do the same if he were one of them.

She seemed always to be surrounded by young men, not to mention older men who didn't have much to do with her

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father, since he was something of a bore, but suddenly became friendly towards him when Gaye was around. The young men for whom Gaye was such a magnet were cadets from Dartmouth, junior officers from the RAF station inland and others who, like himself, were not in uniform for one reason or another.

From the look of them and from the snippets of conversation he overheard when he would lie on the beach trying not to make it obvious that he was watching her, the young men all appeared to have one thing in common. They were public-school types, top-drawer stuff. He envied them. He felt so very much on the outside. He would have loved to have been in there among them with Gaye.

But the summer went by and he remained merely an onlooker. Swimming was over, visitors no longer came and Lydmouth was reduced to the locals and the handful of troops stationed in the area when eventually he did meet her—thanks to his aunt's Irish terrier, Paddy.

He was on an afternoon walk up to the Point. There was some tired-looking barbed-wire there and the two pillboxes were only casually manned by the Home Guard now since Hitler had hitherto shown no interest in Lydmouth and was unlikely to do so with all he had on his plate by that time. In fact there was seldom anybody to be seen around there.

He encountered Gaye and her mother coming towards him from the Point with their two Pekinese. Mrs. Pascoe, who gave much attention to her appearance in the outlandish hope that she and Gaye might be mistaken for sisters, was not well liked in Lydmouth. John had never heard anyone in the town say anything nice about Mrs. Pascoe.

Although Paddy was well on in years he still had much of his Irish spirit and he went after the Pascoe dogs. John had some trouble in catching him. Mrs. Pascoe was furious. Gaye appeared to be amused.

When at length John managed to get Paddy on to his lead, Mrs. Pascoe said, "That's Mrs. Lovelock's dog, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell Mrs. Lovelock her dog should be kept properly under control."

"I'm sorry."

"Come on, Gaye."

Mrs. Pascoe turned on her heel and went off. Gaye paused, gave him a smile, and then joined her. The smile thrilled him. Going on up the hill he looked back several times, with

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a wonderful inner glow from that smile, to watch Gaye making her way with her mother back into the town.

After that he saw to it that he walked Paddy up to the Point at around the same time each afternoon. But it seemed that an afternoon walk to the Point was not a regular routine with Mrs. Pascoe and Gaye. He had despaired of encountering them again; then one afternoon, walking up through the drizzle that was drifting in off the sea, his heart leapt when he saw Gaye, alone with the dogs, coming down the slope.

"Oh, hello," she said, smiling. "I see you have that ferocious dog of yours on a lead this time."

"He's not really ferocious."

"I know. Don't take any notice of Mother. He's probably very friendly."

She bent down and patted the terrier. "You're Mrs. Lovelock's nephew, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"What do you think of life in Lydmouth? Pretty quiet, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

As they talked he felt conscious that she was making all the conversation. His mind raced, trying to think of something more worthwhile than just his yes-no contributions; some topic that would keep her there. But it didn't seem to be necessary. She showed no sign of moving off, and when the low black clouds looming up from the bay turned the drizzle into rain she glanced up at the shelter on the side of the hill.

"We'd better get out of this. Come on, dogs."

Sitting on the bench in the concrete shelter—a favourite spot for summer visitors to take in the view—he felt gauche. He was so excited about her being there beside him that he just couldn't think of anything to say, apart from some inane comments about the dogs, which he had to keep separated until Paddy eventually lost interest in the Pekes and settled down.

The conversation in fact lapsed completely. This was agony. He had wanted so much to meet her, and now here he was with her and all he could do was sit here in silence and from time to time give her a self-conscious smile. She couldn't help but feel that he was a complete oaf.

"You can kiss me if you want to."

He looked at her, startled by the unexpectedness of this.

"I know you want to," she said. "I've seen you on the

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beach looking at me and pretending not to when I looked over at you."

He wondered whether he was blushing. He could feel the rush of blood to his face.

"Well?" she said.

He still hesitated.

"Nobody can see us here," she said, "if that's what you're worried about."

Tentatively he leaned across and put his lips to hers. Her arms went up around him. He found himself being passionately embraced. Her mouth worked feverishly on his, her whole body in agitation.

Then, abruptly, she stopped. She looked at him and smiled. "Now, don't you feel better?"

He put his face forward to kiss her again, but she turned her head aside and looked out across the slope.

"Looks as though the rain's stopping," she said, getting up and adjusting her raincoat. "Come on, dogs, we've got to go home for tea."

The unsettled weather continued for several days, getting worse, becoming really cold and wet. But he braved the elements, walking Paddy through the rain, passing by the shelter, hoping against hope that she too had ventured out. But he neither saw her there nor in the town, where he made unnecessary visits to various shops in which he might by chance run into her. He saw no sign of her.

"The Pascoes keep themselves to themselves . . ." It was so true what they said in Lydmouth. But how did they manage it in a place so small? What did they do with themselves in the big house in the winter months?

He had been shaken by the interlude in the shelter, time and again going back over every moment of it in his mind, chiding himself for his awkwardness. Perhaps she had written him off as a dull fish. He wanted desperately to see her again and show her otherwise.

More than a week went by and he felt that she must surely be going out of her way not to bump into him, or else she had gone away for a while.

Then one day she came into the shop. He almost dropped the non-selling ornamental vase he was dusting.

"Oh, hello," she said. "You do sell envelopes, don't you?"

"Yes."

But she was offhand and impersonal as he showed her their selection and she made her choice. Of course his aunt was

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there in the shop too, so that was probably the explanation. Having made her purchase she said, "Cheerio," and he was left feeling flat.

However, there was one thing. They sold envelopes and other stationery which visitors might want along with their picture postcards, but usually the local people bought their stationery at Smith's. It gave him a spurt of hope that she had come in to make such an unlikely purchase.

She came in again, several times, to buy the odd item which she could more conveniently have bought in the High Street. But each time his aunt was there and he could not bring himself to go beyond merely serving her and then afterwards, when she had gone out of the shop, rebuking himself for letting yet another opportunity go begging.

He cursed his shyness. Perhaps not shyness, because he had never been so bashful with other girls. He was in awe of her, that was the trouble.

He determined on boldness the next time he saw her—unless she gave up affording him these opportunities which he didn't take and there wasn't a next time.

"Lana Turner's on at the Rex, would you like to see it?"

He came right out with it the morning she was in the shop apparently buying ink.

"I would."

"It'd have to be tonight, it's the last day. All right?"

"I couldn't come tonight. We're having people to dinner."

"Oh." Disappointment.

"I could come this afternoon—but perhaps you have to help your aunt?"

"No, she won't mind."

"All right, then."

They were the only patrons upstairs at the Rex. The usherette just waving her torch at the expanse of empty seats, didn't even bother to show them to their places. He walked Gaye along a row to a couple of seats in the middle.

Downstairs there were a fair number of people, judging from the laughter at the Mickey Mouse. But he had felt he must make the big gesture. Nothing but the best for Gaye Pascoe.

However, he felt that they were so conspicuous sitting all alone in the circle with the usherette standing by, yawning by now at her umpteenth viewing of *Weekend at the Waldorf*, that it was not until the picture was well advanced that he took Gaye's hand.

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Almost at once she withdrew it and he thought he had done the wrong thing until he realised she had freed her hand in order to undo the top buttons of her blouse. Then from her movements beside him he couldn't quite fathom what she was doing, but at length she leaned towards him and he was excitingly startled to see that she was bare under the blouse.

"Go on," she said.

He glanced nervously around at the usherette. It wasn't all that dark, especially when a sunny outdoor sequence flashed on to the screen. He felt uneasy.

She took his hand and put it inside her blouse.

"Oh, divine," she said.

He soon felt acutely embarrassed by her lack of restraint. If anyone should see them—he darted another look around at the usherette. She had gone off somewhere.

"What's the matter?" Gaye asked him.

"It's all right."

But it wasn't. He became conscious of somebody being over there at the entrance and glanced around again. The usherette was back—with the manager. Oh God. His sense of guilt froze him into inaction.

Gaye realised what was disturbing him. "You silly," she said, calmly doing up her blouse.

And when anxiously he had another look, he saw that neither the usherette nor the manager was showing the slightest interest in them. Could be the manager often took a pleasant little trip upstairs when things were slack. But he and Gaye saw out the rest of the film sitting decorously side by side.

John emerged from the cinema in a turmoil of excitation, frustration and the after-effects of tension. But Gaye appeared quite unruffled.

"Would you like to have tea or something?" he asked her. "We could go to the Galleon."

"No, thanks. I must get back." She touched his arm. "Thanks for the film. I loved it."

And then she was gone.

He couldn't make Gaye Pascoe out. She could appear to be so pleased when they encountered each other. She could be affectionate—fervent in point of fact—when they were together. And then she could be so completely offhand about him as to virtually ignore the fact that he existed.

When two people are taken with each other, it's contact every day, even if only a phone call. He *had* phoned the Pascoe place once, but it was the clipped voice of Mrs. Pascoe

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that had come on at the other end. He had hung up and hadn't raised the courage to try again. And Gaye, of course, had never phoned him.

Having contact with him every day, or regularly at any rate, didn't seem to fit in with how she felt about him. How *did* she feel about him? It seemed so odd that only when they happened to meet did she take any interest in him. He felt so frustrated by her tantalising casualness.

He wondered why she bothered with him at all. Was it just because he was goodlooking? He knew that he was, but far from being conceited about it, it was a source of embarrassment to him when customers said things to his aunt like, "What a goodlooking boy young John is," and "He's going to break a lot of hearts before he's through." People always said such things in a loud voice, mistakenly thinking the person concerned would be so pleased to overhear. He never knew where to turn when they passed such comments.

But there were enough goodlooking boys among Gaye Pascoe's crowd. It couldn't be just that. The only other clue was a remark she had made to him in the cinema. "You're not good for me." "What do you mean?" he had asked. "Oh, nothing," she had said, dismissing it.

He was turning the whole thing over in his mind yet again, when they literally bumped into one another as she came out of a shop in the High Street.

"Oh, hello," she said. "How are you?"

"I'm fine."

"I'm having a party on Saturday. Would you like to come?"

"Yes, I would."

"Nothing formal. We're just going to dance to records and things. About eight. All right?"

"That'd be fine."

"Good. I must dash now. See you then."

He didn't feel he looked very smart in his utility suit at the party. The young army officers and the others in uniform looked very dapper and those in civilian clothes seemed somehow to have been able to get well-tailored suits even at that stage of clothes rationing. The girls, too, had dresses that obviously weren't utility.

As far as he could see, only two of the girls were from Lydmouth—Gaye's cousin and one other girl whom he didn't know beyond her having been a couple of times in the shop.

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A few of the boys were of well-to-do families that lived locally and he didn't know them except by sight. In the main, Gaye's guests were imports and he felt rather at a loss. Also they were drinking Scotch—where had they been able to get so much?—and he didn't drink to any great extent. A few beers at The Sloop was about all. He certainly didn't tuck it away as they did.

He had a few dances. Not with Gaye—she appeared to be too busy organising things. But the girls he danced with were not very talkative, at least not to him. They looked across at other couples, called things out to them and laughed uproariously at private jokes. He felt very much out of things, despite Gaye's coming to him from time to time and saying, "How are you getting on?" and he wound up looking through the records and putting on the appropriate number anyone asked for.

In due course, either because he wasn't used to Scotch or because it was rather raw wartime hooch, he began to feel heady—sufficiently so to decide to seek out Gaye and say, "Come on, let's dance." She wasn't in the main room—perhaps she was through in the kitchen helping to get some food ready.

He went, a trifle unevenly, along the corridor towards the kitchen. The library door was ajar. Mrs. Pascoe had a penetrating voice well known among the shopkeepers of Lydmouth, especially when she was in complaining mood, which was not infrequent. He could not help but hear her now as what she was saying brought him to a halt in the corridor.

"Why on earth did you invite that Ryerson boy?"

"He's all right."

"He's not all right, Gaye."

"What's wrong with him?"

"He's common."

"Oh, I don't know."

"His aunt keeps a shop. Heaven knows what his parents were. His father was probably a butcher or some such thing."

"I don't think so."

"Well, he's out of place among your friends. I was embarrassed when he appeared. I had no idea you invited him."

"Is it important?"

"Of course it's important. Your father has spent a lot of money so that you could go to the right schools and grow up with the right sort of people and now you choose friends like that. It's very ungrateful, after all we've done for you."

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His aunt was not yet in bed when he got home.

"You're home early," she said.

"I suppose so."

"The party's not over so soon, surely."

"No, it's not over."

"Is anything wrong?"

"No, nothing's wrong."

"Well—?"

"The party was a bit of a bore. I didn't know anybody there. So I came home."

"I see." His aunt paused, looking searchingly at him. "You're sure that was it?"

"Yes. I'm going to bed."

That was the end of Gaye Pascoe as far as he was concerned. It just wasn't worth it. Why try to be in there where he didn't belong? Only to get tantalising condescension from Gaye. And humiliation from her mother. He was just asking to get hurt.

So from then on he gave up seeking hopefully to bump into her in the High Street or elsewhere in Lydmouth, and he put her from his thoughts except occasionally to think with a shudder what a fool he had been making of himself . . .

But one day he did see her, coming towards him on the front. There was no sidestreet handy for him to duck into, so he couldn't avoid her.

"Oh, hello," she said brightly. "Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"I've been around."

"I haven't seen you since the party. I've often wondered why you left in such a hurry."

He said nothing.

"We're moving," she said.

"Are you?"

"We're going back to London. The war's as good as over, thank goodness. We can open up our London place again."

"I see."

"My mother and father are up there now as a matter of fact, seeing about it."

"Oh?"

"The house is all locked up. I'm staying with my cousin."

"Oh, yes?"

She looked at him. "You don't seem very cheery today."

"I'm fine."

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She paused. "I'm going up to the house now. I've got to pop in there for a moment. Do you want to walk with me?"

Moment of decision. He should say, "Afraid not, there's something I have to do." But instead he felt the old quickening within himself at the prospect of spending some time with her. "All right," he said.

When they got near the house she said, "You wait here a minute. I'll go ahead and open the front gates so that you can get in."

"Why?"

"Better if no-one sees us going in together." She smiled. "You know what Lydmouth's like."

After they had completed the manœuvre and were going up the drive, he noticed that the shutters were across the downstairs windows. When they got in, the hall was in semi-darkness, the only light coming from the window at the stair landing.

"Won't be a tick," she said, going up the stairs and leaving him standing in the gloom of the hallway.

She had closed the front door behind them. What did that mean, he wondered. Why had she brought him along on this errand of hers, anyway?

He stood there for some time. Was she up there in one of the bedrooms waiting for him to go up? Was that what he was meant to do? Had she changed into something flimsy and when he went up and found the right room she would be lying there on the bed? She reappeared on the stairs.

"Hope I wasn't too long." She was carrying some things and put them on the hall table.

"I'm going to miss the old place," she said, glancing around. Then she turned, to stand before him, just looking at him.

When he kissed her it was with a wonderful sense of freedom from possible observation by people who might have been walking up to the Point, cinema usherettes and the like. Relaxed and unhurried, it was marvellous to hold her in his arms that way.

"Just a minute."

She detached herself and, taking his hand, led him through the broad doorway into the drawing room. She partially opened one of the shutters so that a slit of light broke in.

Then she took off her clothes, as unconcernedly as if he were not there. He wished she hadn't. He was denied any sense of conquest.

She went to the big couch and kneeling on it she sat back

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on the balls of her feet, her hands lodged in her lap, shoulders back and head erect. It was a pose he had seen in a glossy.

"Do you think I've a nice figure?"

"Lovely."

"One of my father's friends is a photographer in London. He wants me to do some modelling for him." She smiled. "Not like this, of course. He's not *that* sort of photographer. Fashion modelling. I think it would be rather exciting. You can look forward to seeing my picture in all the magazines. Don't you want to make love to me?"

He didn't feel at his ease when they were making love. With the house to themselves, nothing to worry about, the leisurely calm of being undisturbed should have made it just that much more exciting. But she was *so* beautiful in the soft light from the shutters. She had so much class, so different from any girl he had been with before. He found it hard to believe that it was he who was with her now in the big house, on the gold-brocaded couch.

This might merely have crossed his mind, but as well he could not help being aware that it was *she* who was making love to him. She was in command. It made him feel self-conscious. As with taking her clothes off, he was denied the feeling of being a male asserting himself.

Then after a while, he thought, the moment would come when they would just lie quietly there, talking. At last free to talk unhindered. But still, strangely, she seemed as impersonal as ever. She didn't call him dear, or darling, or say, "I love you," or any of the other things one says at such times. He just didn't seem to be able to get to her. There was no warmth, no feeling that they meant anything to one another.

Then, abruptly, she said, "That's all."

She got up from the couch and started putting her clothes on.

"But we haven't—we haven't really made love."

"I must go. My cousin will be wondering where I am."

He felt thwarted. It was all so unsatisfactory.

"Don't go. Not yet." He got up and took her arm.

"No," she said, drawing back.

"But you're going away. I won't see you again."

She went on with her dressing. "Gaye, please."

He took hold of her again. As she pulled away, the thought that this would be the end of it all was too much for him. He grabbed hold of her, grasping her body to him, trying to kiss her.

"What on earth!"

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"Gaye, don't go! Stay with me, just for a little longer!"

Desperately he tried to kiss her. She turned her head one way and then the other. He pulled at her clothes as she fought to free herself.

"I'm not going to have trouble with you, am I?" she said.

His arms dropped down. "Don't say a thing like that."

She had cheapened everything. When they had come into the room he had envisaged something very wonderful that he would remember fondly for the rest of his life. Instead, she had made it into something akin to a tussle with a casual pick-up on the front.

He could say nothing as they got ready to go. He felt so churned up inside, infuriated about how it had all turned out, rebuking himself for being a fool and weakening when she asked him to walk up to the house, laying himself open again to being humiliated.

When they were in the hall he said, "Why did you do it?"

"Why did I do what?"

"Why did you ask me to come here?"

"You wanted to, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well," she shrugged.

It all welled up inside him and with his face blazing he swore at her. "That's not very nice."

As quickly, his anger abated. "I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry, Gaye. I shouldn't have said that."

She paused, looking at him, and then she said: "The front gates lock of their own accord. Just close them as you go."

"Oh, Gaye, please. I'm sorry."

"Off you go."

He was being dismissed. That was the last straw.

But going down the drive he heard footsteps on the gravel behind him. Perhaps things were going to come right in the end. He stopped and turned to look at her. But she wasn't coming after him. She was walking across to the side gate and she didn't even look in his direction.

He was additionally annoyed, after letting his hopes rise like that, and stormed off down the drive. He'd learned his lesson. He'd stick to the girl he knew in the chemist's and the ATS girl at Wintcombe—at least you knew where you stood.

No wonder his aunt had said when he overheard her talking to one of their customers: "It's best for me not to try to do anything about it. He'll just have to find out for himself. But I hate standing by, knowing he's going to be terribly hurt."

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When Ryerson parked the Jaguar in the forecourt and went up to his London flat, his wife was furious about his lateness. She reminded him that they were going to a dinner party and by the time he had bathed and changed they were going to be awfully late.

He said he had had some business in Lydmouth which had delayed him. But he didn't say what it was.

She pursued him into the bathroom as he started the water and demanded to know what sort of business it was that could make him forget a dinner engagement that was important because some influential people were going to be there.

He told her about buying the house.

"What on earth did you do that for?"

"To pull it down."

"Isn't that being rather childish?"

"I don't think so."

"Really, John!"

He turned on her. "For God's sake, Gaye, what's the good of having a lot of money if I can't indulge a whim when I want to?"

© William Scott 1965

"It says, 'To Atomic Bomb Shelter!'"

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R·I·G·M·A·R·O·L·E

by Morley Callaghan

AFTER they had come in from the party, Jeff Hilton, the advertising man, looked up and saw his young wife, Mathilde, standing there beaming at him. She seemed to him to be glowing from the memory of many whispered conversations with young men who had been anxious to touch her hand or her arm; she smiled and went on dreaming and her wide dark eyes grew soft with tenderness. She began to hum as she walked to the window and stood there looking down at the street in the early winter night; and as Jeff went on watching her he kept resenting that she should have had such a good time at a party that he had found so dull. She had left him alone a lot, but he had always remained aware of the admiration she aroused in the young men around her.

And now she turned, all warm and glowing, and burst out, "Didn't you like the party, Jeff?"

"It was a lousy party," he said vindictively, "I'm fed up with that crowd. No-one ever has anything new or bright to say. They've all gone a little stale."

Mathilde tried to stop smiling, but her dark, ardent face still glowed with warmth as she stood there with her hands clasped in front of her. Though Jeff went on talking with a kind of good-humoured disgust his earnest face began to show such a desolate loneliness that she suddenly felt guilty; she longed to offer up to him all the tenderness, all the delight it had been so enchanting to have in her since the party. "I had an awfully good time," she said. "But I kept my eye on you. I know who you were with. Were you watching me, Jeff?" and she rushed over to him and threw herself on his lap and began to kiss him and rub her hand through his hair, laughing all the time like a little girl.

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"Did you think I was flirting? Did you think I laughed and whispered too much? Don't you love people to think I'm pretty?"

But Jeff, who had such a dull time, felt only that she was trying to console him and make him feel good; so he said irritably, "You don't need to feel you neglected me. Don't feel guilty. Nobody ever has to worry about me trailing you around. You can feel free."

"Jeff," she said very softly, "I don't want to feel free. I don't feel free now."

"Sure you do. You'd be the first to complain if you didn't."

"Didn't you really worry a little about me once tonight, Jeff?"

"Listen here, Mathilde," he said shortly, "jealous men are the greatest bores in the world."

"Jeff, put your arms around me."

"What's the matter with you? You don't need to mollify me or feel guilty because you had a good time. Surely we've got beyond that."

"I wasn't trying to mollify you," she said, looking quite lost, and she began to show in her face much of that curious discontent he had felt growing in her the last three months. She was pouting like a child and she had the shame of one whose innocent gift has been rejected curtly, and then she went away from him awkwardly and curled herself up on the couch, almost crouching, her eyes hardening as she stared at him.

After a while he said, "You're childish, Mathilde. Why are you sitting there as if you hate me?" But he began to feel quite helpless against her silent, unreasonable and secret anger.

"These last few months you've become about as unreasonable as a sick woman. What on earth is the matter with you?" he said. And he got up and paced up and down and his voice rose as he went on questioning her, but every time he passed the couch where she was crouching he became more disturbed by the passionate restlessness he felt in her.

So he tried to laugh and he said, "This is a lot of nonsense, Mathilde," and he sat down beside her. In a rough, good-natured way he tried to pull her against him. When she pushed him away he stared at her for a long time till at last he began to desire her, and again he put his arm around her, and again she pushed him away. Then he lost his temper; he

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threw his arms around her and held her down while he tried to caress her.

"Stop it, stop it, Jeff!" she cried. "Haven't you got any sense at all? Doesn't it mean anything to you that you didn't want me near you a few minutes ago? What do you think I am?"

As she pulled away roughly she was really pleading with him to see that she was struggling to hold on to something he had been destroying carelessly month after month. "Doesn't it mean anything?" she asked.

"There you go," he said. "Why can't you be direct about things instead of sentimental?"

"Because I don't want things that way," she said. And then she cried passionately, "You can't touch me whenever you like. You can't do that to me just when you feel like it," and her eyes were full of tears as if at last she had touched the true source of all her disappointment.

But he grabbed hold of her, held her a moment to show he could possess her, then pushed her away. "I'm not a little boy playing that old game," he shouted. "We've been married three years. Why all the rigmarole?" and he expressed the rage that was growing in him by banging her on the knee with his fist.

"Oh, you've hurt me," she said, holding the spot. "Why did you do that?" and she began to cry a little. "That ends it. You'll never hit me again," she said.

"Damn it all, I didn't hit you."

"You did. Oh, dear, you did! That settles it. I'll not stay around here! I'll not stay another night! I'm going now!"

"Go ahead. Do what you want to."

"Don't worry. I'll soon be gone," she said, and with tears streaming from her eyes she ran into the bedroom. He stood gloomily at the door with his arms folded across his chest. He watched her pull out drawers, toss dresses into a suitcase, and sweep silver at random from the dressing-table. Sometimes she stopped to press her fists against her eyes. He began to feel so distressed, watching, that he shouted at last, "I won't stand for this stupid exhibition!" and he jumped at her and flung his arms around her and squeezed her as though he would crush for ever the unreasonable revolt in her soul. Then he grew ashamed and he said, "I won't stop you, and I won't stay and watch this stupid performance either. I'm going out."

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And when he left her she was still pulling out and emptying the chest of drawers.

As soon as Jeff walked along the street from the apartment house on that early winter night he began to feel that he really had not left that room at all, that wherever he walked, wherever he went, he would still be pulled back there to the room to watch her, and when he went into the corner tavern to have a glass of beer he sat there mopping his forehead and thinking, Not just when I want, not just when I feel like it! I can't go on with that stuff when we're so used to each other. I'd feel stupid.

In the crowded tavern men and women leaned close together and whispered and while he listened Jeff kept hearing her voice beneath the murmuring voices and the clink of glasses and seeing her face in the smoke of the tavern, and as he looked around a dreadful fear kept growing in him that whatever was warm and vital among people was being pushed out of his reach; and then he couldn't stop himself from getting up and hurrying back at once to the apartment house.

He saw her coming out wearing her brown coat, and her felt hat was pulled down over her eyes. She was carrying her bag. A taxi was waiting.

In a foolish way, to hide his eagerness, he smiled and said, "May I take the bag for you, madam?" He even made a little bow.

"No, thanks," she said, and she swayed the bag away from his outstretched hand, looking at him in that shy pleading way.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like me to take it?"

"Quite sure," she said.

"All right," he said politely, and he stood there trying to smile while she got into the cab, and when the cab actually moved off along the street, he stood there, worried and unbelieving, feeling there was no place to go.

But he went into the apartment and as he wandered aimlessly to the bedroom and looked at the empty chest of drawers his loneliness deepened, and he thought, I tried to use some common sense anyway. She'll come back. If I went on struggling with her like that all the time I'd never be able to hold my job. I'll bet a million dollars she'll be back.

And he waited and was desolate remembering the shy pleading look in her eyes as she swayed the bag away from him

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◆ Morley Callaghan, born in Toronto in 1903, started his writing career as a newspaperman on the *Toronto Star*—where one of his colleagues was Ernest Hemingway. At the end of the 1920s, Callaghan, then married, went to Paris, pursuing his writing full-time and mingling with all the principal literary figures. Since then he has established his reputation with a dozen highly-praised novels, one of which—*That Summer in Paris*—is a memoir of his time there, and many short stories of which *Rigmarole* is a fine example

on the pavement, and he listened for every small sound from the street, the stairs and the door; and when at last he heard the key turning in the lock he jumped up triumphantly and rushed to meet her.

She came in quietly with a timid, apologetic smile, and as she pulled off her hat she said in a bantering tone, "What were you doing, Jeff? What was keeping you up?"

"Waiting for you, of course."

"You mean you missed me?"

"Sure I missed you. You know I did, too," he said. He helped her off with her coat, begged her to sit down, rushed to the fridge to get a snack for them and his face kept showing all of his childish triumph. She was delighted to be waited on in this different way. Every time the broad smile came on his face she asked, "What are you laughing at, Jeff?"

"How does it feel to be free?" was all he said.

But when they were going to bed and she had buried her dark head in the pillow she began to cry brokenly, and no matter how he coaxed her, or how gently he spoke she would not be quiet.

"Aren't we happy now, Mathilde? Isn't it all over now?" he kept on saying.

"No, I'm not happy. I can't bear it," she said.

"You can't bear what?"

"The way you let me go. No matter what happened I didn't think you'd ever let me go. You wouldn't have done it two years ago."

"But you wanted to go, Mathilde, and if I thought you wanted to . . ."

"Two years ago you would have made me come back. You would have been afraid of losing me."

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"I knew you'd come back like a homing pigeon."

"Yes, you were so sure of it. You were so very sure," she said, and then she put her hands over her face and she turned her head away, mumbling, "I'm silly. I guess I sound silly. I guess I don't know what I want," and he could only see the back of her neck and her hand moving over her cheek.

As he walked around the bed, looking at her, he thought, Why didn't I stop her? Why can't she see that knowing we love each other is better than worrying that we don't, but he began to feel terribly afraid. "Nobody loves insecurity," he said, knowing his words sounded weak and apologetic. For a while he watched her, then went to speak, but he found himself shyly fumbling what seemed to be old words; so he stood there, silent, with his love becoming an ache, for it seemed a terrible thing that such words should sound strange just because they had grown used to each other. Then he knew that his fear had been that he would never be able to express all the feeling he had for her. And all he said was, "I had a glass of beer at the corner and I began to feel terrible."

"Did you?" she said, without looking up.

"I think I know what you've been missing," he said.

"Yes," she said.

"I couldn't stay away from here," he said. "I felt you'd be pulled back too."

She looked up at him timidly for though the words he used were neither new, nor warm, nor strange, she began to feel his awkward shyness, she began almost to hear him thinking. "What happens that you can't keep showing your love when it's so strong in you?" She just waited there and grew shy too, and the feeling between them at that moment seemed so much deeper than any earlier time of impulse and sudden joy.

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POET'S LOT

There was a young man of Japan
Whose limericks never would scan;
When they said it was so,
He replied, "Yes, I know,
But I always try to get as many words into the
last line as ever I possibly can."

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WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

by Samuel Selvon

ONE morning Ramkilawansingh (after this, we calling this man Ram) was making a study of the noticeboards along Westbourne Grove what does advertise rooms to let. Every now and then he writing down an address or a telephone number, though most of the time his eyes colliding up with *No Colours, Please*, or *Sorry, No Kolors*.

"Red, white and blue, all out but you," Ram was humming a little ditty what children say when they playing whoop. Just as he get down by Bradley's Corner he met Fraser.

"You look like a man who looking for a place to live," Fraser say.

"You look like a man who could tell me the right place to go," Ram say.

"You try down by Ladbroke Grove?" Fraser ask.

"I don't want to go down in that criminal area," Ram say, "at least, not until they find the man who kill Kelso."

"Then you will never live in the Grove," Fraser say.

"You are a contact man," Ram say, "which part you think I could get a room, boy?"

Fraser scratch his head. "I know of a landlord up the road who vow that he ain't ever taking anybody who come from the West Indies. But he don't mind taking Indians. He wouldn't know the difference when he see you is a Indian... them English people so foolish they believe every Indian come from India."

"You think I stand a chance?" Ram ask.

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"Sure, you stand a chance. All you have to do is put on a turban."

"I never wear a turban in my life; I am a born Trinidadian, a real Creole. All the same, you best hads give me the address, I will pass around there later."

So Fraser give him the address, and Ram went on reading a few more boards, but he got discourage after a while and went to see the landlord.

The first thing the landlord ask him was, "What part of the world do you come from?"

"I am an Untouchable from the heart of India," Ram say. "I am looking for a single room. I dwelt on the banks of the Ganges. Not too expensive."

"But you are not in your national garments," the landlord say.

"When you are in Rome," Ram say, making it sound like an original statement, "do as the Romans do."

While the landlord sizing up Ram, an Indian tenant come up the steps to go inside. This fellar was Chandrilaboodoo (after this, we calling this man Chan) and he had a big beard with a hairnet over it, and he was wearing a turban. When he see Ram, he clasp his hands with the palms touching across his chest by way of greeting.

The old Ram catch on quick and do the same thing.

"*Acha, Hindustani,*" Chan say.

"*Acha, pilau, papadom, chickenvindaloo,*" Ram say desperately, hoping for the best.

Chan nod his head, say good morning to the landlord and went inside.

That was a narrow shave, Ram thought, I have to watch out for that man.

"That was Mr. Chan," the landlord say, "he is the only other Indian tenant I have at the moment. I have a single room for two pounds. Are you a student?"

"Who is not a student?" Ram say, getting into the mood of the thing. "Man is for ever studying ways and means until he passes into the hands of Allah."

Well, to cut a long story short, Ram get a room on the first floor, right next door to Chan, and he move in that same evening.

But as the days going by, Ram had to live like cat-and-mouse with Chan. Every time he see Chan, he have to hide in case this man start up this Hindustani talk again, or start to ask him questions about Mother India. In fact, it begin

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to get on Ram nerves, and he decide to do something.

"This house too small for the two of we," Ram say to himself, "one will have to go."

So Ram went down in the basement to see the landlord.

"I have the powers of the Occult," Ram say, "and I have come to warn you of this man Chan. He is not a good tenant. He keeps the bathroom dirty, he does not tidy up his room at all, and he is always chanting and saying his prayers loudly and disturbing the other tenants."

"I have had no complaints," the landlord say.

"But I am living next door to him," Ram say, "and if I concentrate my powers I can see through the wall. That man is a menace, and the best thing you can do is to give him notice. You have a good house here and it would be a pity to let one man spoil it for the other tenants."

"I will have a word with him about it," the landlord say.

Well, the next evening Ram was in his room when he hear a knock at the door. He run in the corner quick and stand upon his head, and say, "Come in." The landlord come in.

"I am just practising my yoghourt," Ram say.

"I have had a word with Mr. Chan," the landlord say, "and I have reason to suspect that you have deceived me. You are not from India, you are from the West Indies."

Ram turn right-side up. "I am a citizen of the world," he say.

"You are flying false colours," the landlord say. "You do not burn incense like Mr. Chan, you do not dress like Mr. Chan, and you do not talk like Mr. Chan."

"Give me a break, old man," Ram say, falling back on the good old West Indian dialect.

"It is too late. You have already started to make trouble. You must go."

Well, the very next week find Ram out scouting again, giving the boards a perusal, and who he should chance to meet but Fraser.

He start to tell Fraser how life hard, how he had to keep dodging from this Chan fellar all the time, and it was pure torture.

"Listen," Fraser say, "you don't mean a big fellar with a beard, and he always wearing a turban?"

"That sound like him," Ram say. "You know him?"

"Know him!" Fraser say. "Man, that is a fellar from Jamaica who I send to that house to get a room!"

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THE MAN WHO LIKED HOLOCAUSTS

ON that January evening in 1930 there was a big dinner at the Imperial Palace in Addis Ababa.

The Ethiopian sovereign was the same then as now. But he did not yet call himself Haile Selassie. He went by the title of Negus Tafari. But that made no difference to the pomp of the ceremony.

It was a pomp which—like everything else in that strange town was a mixture of the Abyssinian protocol of the Middle Ages and the most modern European customs. Sitting at the Negus' table were old warriors with ebony faces, dressed in the traditional white *chamma,* of which the huge billowing folds reminded one of the classical toga, and diplomats in tailcoats. Slaves with animal-like faces, who to the last drop of their and their descendants' blood were their master's property, waited on the guests, while on the dining-room wall, in a place of honour, was an airplane propeller in the hub

by JOSEPH KESSEL

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of which French mechanics had ingeniously fitted a clock.

The food and drink contrasted in the same way. Dishes suited to a Parisian palate were served side by side with *inghira,* a sort of heavy paste which took the place of bread, spread with *watt*, a disgusting sauce of red barberry. Bottles of champagne stood next to jugs of *tetch*, a heady, intoxicating hydromel, the favourite drink of the Abyssinian nobility.

The Negus was wearing a black cloak. Across his chilly knees was a lion-skin. On each side of him was a lady in an elegant, low-cut evening dress.

Opposite the sovereign sat a child with dark eyes and curly hair. This was the Crown Prince. On his right was the British consul; on his left, the Italian tank-instructor.

Nor did the mixture end there. By their uniforms, I recognised the Belgian officer in charge of drill and the Swedish officer in charge of the artillery. Finally, at the other end of the table, my friend Maillet smiled at me with his frank and manly smile, showing his white teeth. He had been a French pilot during the Great War, had escaped from a German prison camp, had pioneered flying in Indo-China and was now commander of the Ethiopian air force.

In short, I knew the names and appointments of all the guests. All, that is, except those of the man sitting immediately opposite me. I would probably not have noticed him if his unusual attire for a ceremonial dinner had not attracted my attention.

He was wearing a blue jacket and white flannel trousers.

When greeting the Negus, he had explained his clothes, in the broadest of American accents, by saying, "I guess I've just come from tennis, and I've had no time to change, boss." He had accompanied his words with a sort of cordial neigh, and had then proceeded to drink down half a dozen cocktails one after the other.

He was a very tall man with wide shoulders. His face bore an expression of hard and intense greed; he had carnivorous teeth, a narrow forehead and high cheekbones, which were always in movement, like billiard balls.

He drank an incredible amount and talked in a loud voice without caring if anyone was listening.

When dinner was over, I asked Maillet who the man was. Maillet had been at the Negus' court for a long time and knew a great deal.

"I don't know," my friend said. "I know nothing about that American, except that his name is Jack Jackson. He

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arrived yesterday. But why he's here, what he does and who introduced him are mysteries."

A week went by, and it seemed to go as quickly as a short day. I lived in a sort of perpetual enchantment. Addis Ababa was unlike any other town in the world; it lay at an altitude of ten thousand feet, amid great eucalyptus trees. It acted on me like a spell.

The air was fresh. The sun generous. The streets swarmed with a crowd you could never tire of watching. Warriors armed with curved swords and lances, half-naked Gallas, Chankella slaves scarcely removed from primitive animality. Somalis proud as classical bronzes, Issa and Danakil caravaneers, indeed all the black tribes from Upper Egypt to the Red Sea mingled in the streets and squares.

Greek, Armenian and Maltese merchants displayed their wares in the open air.

The *toucouls*—conical huts—built with no sort of alignment, added to the chaos created by the population.

The luxury cars from the legations moved slowly through the crowd, which made reluctant way for them. But the noisy crowd had only to hear the warning shouts of the runner preceding some high Abyssinian nobleman and his escort to scatter as if by enchantment. Then an impassive, haughty, bearded warrior would amble past on a mule with red leather saddlery.

Behind him came his soldiers and slaves. Beside him ran a slave with a fly-whisk.

These thousand sights, which changed with every hour of the day, fused into one huge and splendid fresco on the feast of St. Michael when, each year, the high Coptic clergy proceeded to the blessing of the altar stones removed from the churches of Addis Ababa for the occasion.

Only a film taken by a cameraman of genius could have expressed the towering magnificence, the grandiose beauty of a spectacle in which the rites of the desert, the charms of nature, the age-old ceremonies of a curious cult, the concourse of an immense crowd, and also the presence of the black emperor, with his court, were fused in seemingly endless rejoicing.

There were frenzied dances in the squares, performed by whole tribes gathered in perpetually moving circles, while witch-doctors whipped the bare legs of the performers to make them jump higher; there was endless, ecstatic chanting, hysterical wailing, shouting and howling as the black crowds

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gave way to a pagan excitement, an exaltation of dervishism born of the jungle and the desert.

And all this was only the prelude to the real ceremony, which took place outside the town in a vast clearing surrounded by gently sloping hills covered with giant eucalyptus.

Every hill carried spectators; there were at least a hundred thousand men present. One hundred thousand ebony bodies, clothed in one-hundred thousand white tunics, in tiers beneath the pale green foliage of the eucalyptus trees—such was the background.

In the centre of this fantastic amphitheatre, the priests danced to the sound of drums, flutes and cymbals. They wore purple, coral and emerald silk robes. Long flexible canes quivered in their hands as if the shrill, monotonous rhythm had cast a spell on them. They advanced, backed and whirled as they sang. And others, bearing the heavy altar stones on their heads, stood motionless as idols, watching the ageless choreography which made you think of the dance before the Ark.

Madmen rolled screaming on the ground. At one end of the clearing the Negus, surrounded by his officers, ministers and most powerful chiefs, sat on a golden throne. How slender and small he looked, how chilly in spite of his lion-skin, amid the tough figures of his favourite *ras*!

Only one white face stood out against the background of dark ones. And, to my profound astonishment, I recognised in the distance the blue coat and flannel trousers which had so much surprised me at the Negus' dinner. It was Jack Jackson.

His eyes were closed and he was chewing gum.

Addis Ababa was really the most extraordinary town. It even had a nightclub in its neighbourhood. It was called Robinson, and it was run by a Greek.

It was situated some twelve kilometres from the capital, at the point where the carriage-road ended. I was taken there by some friends on the evening of the feast of St. Michael. Of all the contrasts which tested my nerves in Addis Ababa, one of the most violent was undoubtedly to pass suddenly from a mystical and barbarian celebration to a sort of mediocre provincial nightclub.

The walls were hung with pink, flowered hangings. Four musicians scraped out waltzes, foxtrots and tangos. The little lamps on the tables were covered with shades in almost

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pathetic bad taste. The ashtrays bore the names of important French firms.

And this is why I remember the ashtrays so well . . .

The Greek proprietor said sadly, "It's not possible to drink, sir."

"Why?" one of us asked.

"I've got no more glasses or cups," he groaned.

He lowered his voice, pointed to the corner of the room and murmured, "The gentleman over there has broken everything. He has paid and paid well. I can't complain about that. But I was very frightened. And the whole room emptied."

Perhaps our voices woke the sleeper. I do not know. But anyway he sat up; and the coarse face and wide shoulders of Jack Jackson appeared above the tablecloth.

"Hello!" he said jovially. "I'll buy you a drink."

"In what?" the Greek sighed.

"In the ashtrays," Jackson said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Have them washed in my presence!"

The man was obviously very drunk, but with that lucid, semi-visionary drunkenness which is sometimes the permanent state of alcoholics.

Jack Jackson took off his coat. Under his silk shirt you could see the play of powerful, splendid muscles, the muscles of a great cat. He had the look of a boxer, a body conditioned to every form of excess, and a disturbingly cruel expression. He was in splendid form.

We drank to each other out of the ashtrays.

Jackson came and sat beside me.

"What are you selling?" he asked abruptly.

"Nothing," I said.

"How right you are, especially in this goddam country!" he cried. "I've brought their king the best deal in the world. Do you know whom I'm representing?"

He searched his pockets and brought out, together with bundles of dollars, half a dozen business cards. They bore the names of the greatest United States' armament firms.

"That's why you were received better than an ambassador!" I said.

Jackson looked at me in stupefaction and laughed.

"Do you expect them to keep an American waiting?"

Then, growing excited, he went on: "I'm always welcome everywhere," he said proudly. "I know how to choose the

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countries where they need me. I've sold aircraft and machine-guns to Chinese marshals, mountain guns to Albania, rifles to Ireland, grenades to the Hedjaz. I smell war and revolution from a distance. I've a flair for it, and I've got credit."

He poured brandy into his ashtray, emptied it and went on: "I'll bet a bag of dollars to a bag of powder that blood will be flowing here soon. So I came. I've offered the little black king aircraft, munitions and the latest model machine-guns—wonderful stuff, jewels. And instructors as well. I sell instructors too. Last year, I supplied forty to Guatemala."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well, he said yes and no, and then yes and no again. I was so bloody angry I came away and got real drunk."

He reflected for a moment or two, put his powerful hand on my arm and said, "You saw that carnival of theirs this morning? Don't you think they'd have done better to give me a few orders?"

"And where are you going next?" one of my friends asked.

"This year, to Cuba. Later, to Spain."

The merchant in death had a nose for holocausts.

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TURKISH DELIGHTS

"Do you like God?" asked a café acquaintance in Turkey, and almost immediately added: "Do you like Mr. Harold Macmillan?"

All that I could find to say in reply was: "Do you mind if I take those questions separately?"

Turkey is quite the place for travel surprises. A friend swears to me that he was once sat down at breakfast opposite a dancing bear. I can remember feeling my way in the dark down the fifth-floor corridor of a hotel in Izmir and suddenly touching nothingness. There was a gap in the wall dropping sheer into the street.

"What happens if somebody falls through?" I asked the proprietor, who looked like Mr. K. in a bad temper.

"They are killed," he replied, frankly enough.

I once waited a fortnight for permission to visit a town near the Bulgarian border.

"Show this document to the police," said the Turkish Foreign Office, "and they will give you every help."

I showed it to the police and was promptly arrested . . .

RICHARD WEST, *New Statesman, 24 January, 1964*

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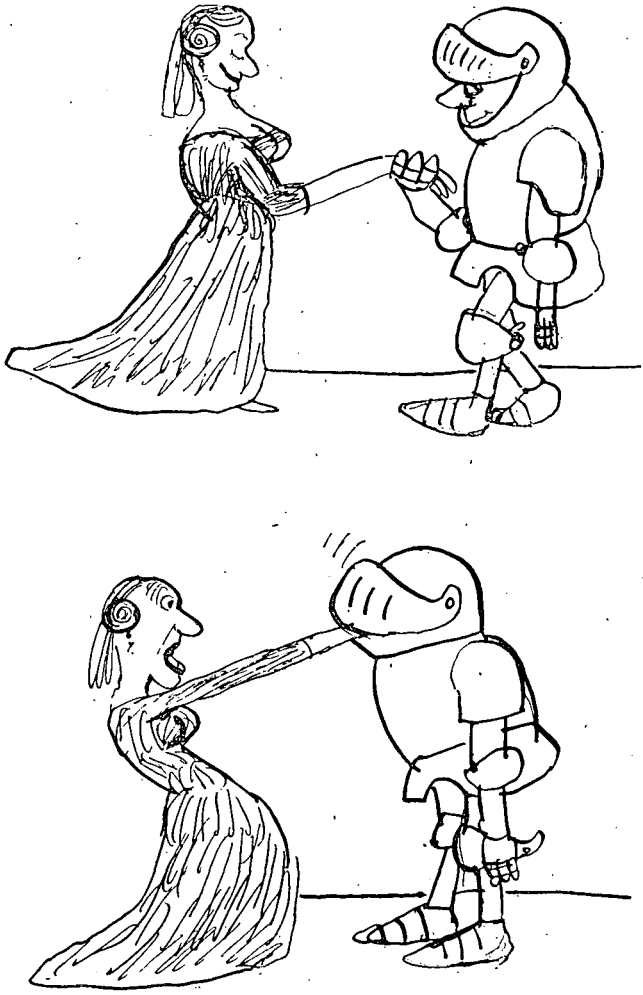
THIS MONTH'S SHORTEST STORY



by ANDRÉ FRANÇOIS

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DON'T WORRY, I SAID . . . YOU'LL NEVER FIND A BETTER BABY-SITTER THAN ME, I SAID

A Spot of Irish Blarney
by
JOHN D. SHERIDAN

USUALLY the sitter comes to the baby, but this baby came to the sitter. His parents delivered him at our hall door, promising to be back at half-past ten at the very latest. They had been full of apologies when they rang up half an hour before to say that they had been called out suddenly, and when they found that I was the only person in the house they were even more contrite.

But I told them not to worry. I was the eldest of nine, so that I had reared eight children before I started in business on my own. They couldn't leave their baby with a better man.

Though he wasn't exactly a baby. He was about five or six, and what they used to call in Donegal "a stirring boy." I was to find out before the night was out just how stirring he was.

First I gave him an apple and two comics, but I might as well have tried to fob off a wolf with a couple of boiled eggs. It soon became clear to me that he expected to be entertained.

We played football in the garden until my wind gave out. He ran after the ball when I kicked it, and laid it down that I must run after it when *he* kicked it. He had a strong sense of justice.

When this palled he suggested that we should play "rushing." I am not as good at rushing as I used to be, so I opted for more kicking, and when I got the chance I sent a high one over the wall.

Then he wanted me to go over after it.

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I explained that there was a cross dog in the next garden, whereupon he asked me to give him a hoosh so that he could see it.

When I told him that the cross dog had gone on holiday to Frinton-on-Sea, he said, "Then why don't you climb over and get the ball?"

Back in the house, he began to test my general knowledge. He asked me where the Congo was, and if wasps could sting dogs, and why hair turned white. I could have told him why hair turned white.

When I suggested a bite to eat he said he wasn't hungry. And neither he was. All he took was a cup of hot milk, four slices of bread and jam, and three bananas. This was all the bananas we had, and he evidently thought it a poor enough ration. He asked me if I didn't *like* bananas.

After this collation he rose like a giant refreshed and said that if he had fourpence more he would have a shilling, and when this deficit had been set right he made straight for the piano.

I brought him back to wash his hands, and then I showed him how to play the scale of C and slide his thumb under his third finger. This acrobatic feat involved all the muscles of his body, and I had to hold him on the stool every time he attempted it.

In the end he abandoned the stool altogether and solved the problem of balance by walking alongside the piano as he played.

Next he became interested in my typewriter and asked me to write him a poem. He even specified the subject. "About me," he said. So I wrote him a poem:

My name is not Alphonsus B,
My name is simply Pat.
I fought a fight with my uncle,
And I flattened him on the mat.

"Now another one," he commanded. "About an elephant."

When that was done he wanted one about a sputnik. Then he asked me if I could play any games.

So I put my hat in the middle of the floor and we began to throw pennies into it. We had six pennies and we threw them in turn. He brought back the pennies after every throw —until he saw that this was unfair to me. "I'll let you bring back your own pennies," he said.

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Just for variety, we had a game of cards and another session at the scale of C. When I refused a challenge to a hopping race he bet me that I couldn't tip my nose with my tongue; and neither I could. While I was trying he studied me very closely and announced that I had hair growing out of my ears. Then he said, "Come on and we'll play more pennies."

But I told him that I had a better game.

"We'll play hospitals," I said.

I set him down on the couch, tied a handkerchief round his forehead, and threw a coat over him.

"Close your eyes," I said, "and don't move. You have had a very serious operation."

"What kind of an operation?"

"You're not supposed to speak," I told him. "You're supposed to be fast asleep."

After a deep coma which lasted fully thirty seconds, he jumped up.

"That's a silly game," he said. "Come on and play pennies with me."

I didn't want to throw pennies. I wanted to lie down and put my feet up. I wanted a bottle of stout and peace to drink it. I was at the very end of my tether. But I put my hat in the middle of the floor and took my stand obediently behind the throwing line.

I tried to save myself then by suggesting that he should take two throws to my one, but he wouldn't hear of this at all. "That wouldn't be fair," he said. "You throw and I'll throw."

So he threw and I threw, he threw and I threw, he threw and I threw. And the pennies rolled under the piano and under the settee and under the rug.

That was how they found us when they came back at twenty minutes to twelve, ever so sorry at having overstayed their leave, and hoping that he hadn't been *too* much of a nuisance. I said not at all. I had enjoyed every single minute of it.

"Any time you want to leave him," I said, "just give us a ring."

"The poor man!" the mother said then. "He's far past his bedtime. He's tired and sleepy."

He may have been far past his bedtime, but he was neither tired nor sleepy.

He was a stirring boy.

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Woman of the Marsh

by DARRELL

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NO," they said, "there is no inn here." One of the men spat into the gutter. "There is nothing."

There was no more to be said, on either side. The men looked at Robert, assessing his nationality and his worth and his purpose, but they didn't ask him any questions. Their eyes were hard and flat and hostile, their mouths set in straight uncompromising lines. They were country people, they knew instinctively that there was nothing to be gained from being polite, and with Gallic logic they wasted no time or breath on it. Robert got on his bicycle and rode away.

The road went south. It went straight for as far as the eye could see across the flat French countryside. There were poplar trees along one side of the road, and between the kilometre stones spikes of purple orchids grew out of the long unkempt verge of grass and vetch. Soon it started to rain.

A horse and cart passed, going slowly towards the village. The man—sitting hunched up over the reins—didn't reply to Robert's greeting. My accent isn't good, Robert thought, perhaps the man didn't understand. Robert was a quiet, modest man. If people were unfriendly, he was apt to think that the fault was his.

Ahead of him now on the road someone was wheeling a bicycle in the rain. When he got nearer he saw that it was a woman; the shapeless black garment made it difficult to tell at a distance in the clouded evening light. The back tyre of her bicycle was flat.

"Can I help?" he asked. He pointed to his pump.

She shook her head. "It's a puncture. Pumping is a waste of breath." She didn't smile, or slacken her pace.

"I have an outfit." Because of the rain and the flat featureless countryside, and the hostility of the villagers and the man in the cart who hadn't replied to his greeting, Robert felt an urge and a need to do a friendly act. "Let me fix it for you."

"Very well." The woman surrendered her bicycle to him, as if it was she who was doing the kindness. And Robert was grateful. He smiled his thanks, the skin at the corners of his mouth folding like a pleased boy. The woman leaned

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against a poplar tree and watched him while he worked on the tyre.

"You're a foreigner, aren't you?"

"I am nothing," Robert said. "I am of no country." The answer came out quickly, it had been rehearsed in his mind. He was tired of the label of nationality, tired of being credited unthinkingly with the stock, imagined characteristics of his kind. "I'm an American, I come from California," he always used to say in England, and people's minds would click into gear. He could see it in their eyes and in their mouths and in their hands. He's well off, they would think, compared with us he's rich; he brushes his teeth twice a day; he has orange juice and cereals for breakfast; he's a friendly, a talkative, a boastful man; his father's probably in oil or real estate. "I am just a—" He searched for another word to impress his anonymity.

"—just a traveller?" The woman looked up at him for a moment. The whites of her eyes, he saw, were shadowed as if they had been touched with smoke.

"Yes," he said, "a traveller, *un voyageur*."

"Where are you going?"

As she talked, as she gradually shed the bleak unapproachable mask of a woman alone on an empty road, Robert saw that her face was neither young nor old. Her eyes were set a long way apart under thick smudges of dark unplucked eyebrows, the cheekbones were high on the smooth olive-coloured cheeks, the lips full and outward-turning like the petals of a pale flower.

"Nowhere," he said. "I looked for somewhere in the village but..." he spread his hands, stretching the limp inner tube between them.

"One could try St Hilaire de Visz." She didn't sound very hopeful, she didn't even sound as if she cared.

"How far is that?"

"A dozen kilometres, or more."

"Too damn far." He said it in English. She sensed the meaning from the tone of his voice, and for the first time she smiled.

"Where then, monsieur, will you sleep?"

"In a barn, or under a hedge."

When the tyre was mended and fixed on the wheel again, Robert gave the bicycle to the woman. She took it without any word or smile of thanks. When she spoke she turned away from him, her eyes on the wet blue-black road.

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"At the kilometre stone, not the next one, but the one after that, is a turning to the left. At the end of the lane there are some chestnut trees. Beyond them is a barn."

She got on to the saddle of her bicycle and started to move away.

"It belongs to my husband, but it has plenty of straw. And in half an hour," she added, still looking at the road, "it will be dark, and no-one would see."

Robert lay in the straw listening to the rain pattering on the roof of the barn. It was half-past ten. He was hungry and his mouth was dry. He shut his eyes and tried to sleep. When he shut his eyes he saw images. The images were of straight lines and squares; the colours, reds and greens and blues against backgrounds of black. There were no curves in the images, no circles or loops or breasts of line. The first image resolved itself into a long straight road, the poplars at the side were tall oblongs of red, the short darts of blue were rain. There were faces now too, made up of squares and triangles, they were silent and they sneered. A curtain of green moved slowly across the faces as if drawn by a hand and in the green were two eyes, like crystals with many sides, and the colour of the eyes was a smoky brown.

"Wake up, *voyageur*." He opened his eyes. The door of the barn was open and a head bent over him.

She had a tin of soup, and some bread and a bottle of country wine. She put them on the straw beside him.

"Have you a cigarette?"

He felt in the pocket of his coat and brought out a crumpled blue packet and gave them to her.

"French cigarettes . . . And yet you are a foreigner. I see you are careful to have no clues to your nationality. *Entendu*, I will ask no questions."

"Isn't it dangerous to smoke in a barn?"

She shrugged. She hadn't changed her clothes. She still wore the drab, shapeless black. "He doesn't like me smoking, so . . . It is better like that perhaps, it gives it the added pleasure of being a sin."

"May I eat?" He was hungry.

"Of course. Do not be polite with me. Politeness is for the rich."

She went soon afterwards to the door of the barn and flicked the stub of her cigarette into the night. "You look hard up." She was still at the door.

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"Do you want some work?"

"Yes," said Robert.

"I can't pay you but I will feed you. And there is only the barn . . ."

He nodded. "What work is it?"

She scratched her stomach as if to impress on him again that she was a woman of the soil, unpolished and poor.

"I will show you in the morning." She turned and went out of the door. She didn't smile, and she didn't say goodnight.

Robert had never slept in a barn before. He had never slept anywhere but in a bed. He had brushed his teeth before he went to sleep for as long as he could remember. His toothbrush was in his rucksack just beyond his reach. He had to sit up to reach it. It seemed a long way and long effort away. There wasn't any water anyway. He yawned and stretched in the straw. He thought of using the last of the wine to do his teeth, but in the end he tipped the bottle up and drank until there was nothing left. He threw the empty bottle away into the straw.

He smiled. A slow contented smile. Perhaps after all the Professor had been right. For two days, ever since he had left St Malo on his bicycle, he had doubted it. It had rained. The people on the roads hadn't smiled or waved, the inn where he had stayed the night before in Brittany had been bleak and sour. But now, yes, now it was all right. It was how he wanted it to be.

"I'm tired," he had said that day in Oxford to that odd, untidy Professor of Anthropology. "I'm tired of being an American in England. People are always expecting things of me, expecting me to conform to their image of a man from California, and if I do conform—if for example I am generous, they take it for granted. 'Of course,' their eyes say, 'he's an American, he's rich, he can afford to be.'"

"And if you don't conform to the pattern," the Professor of Anthropology had asked, "what do we do then?"

"You just shrug your shoulders in your damn English way as if to say one must make allowances, he's only a foreigner."

"What you want is anonymity. Is that it?"

"Yes. That's what I want. Anonymity. So that people will value me and like me, or not like me, for myself."

The Professor had scratched his head, he hadn't had a haircut for months.

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"If I were you," he had said, "I'd go off on a bicycle to La Vendée in France, with a five pound note and your oldest clothes." That in the end was what Robert had done. Just that.

The taste of the Muscadet in his mouth was good, like the first bite of an apple. He yawned again. He would take the taste of the wine into sleep with him, perhaps it would make him dream of orchards, or of William Tell, or serpents perhaps, or Eve. There were bats in the barn, and the occasional rustle of a rat. Soon he was fast asleep.

"Now," he said when he had finished the coffee, "I am ready for work." He wiped the back of his hand roughly across his mouth. The woman smiled. Robert saw the smile, he guessed it was because like a countryman he had used the back of his hand to clean his mouth. It was a quarter-past six. It had rained in the night but now the early morning air was clear and washed and unused.

"Come with me, then." All she had in her hands was a wicker basket closed with a lid.

"Openly," he asked, "or shall I follow afterwards?"

"Openly. This is working time. It is only in the evenings, and on Sundays that people imagine unchristian things."

He followed her along a path between a high growth of reeds. Where the path divided, he saw beyond the reeds a low building roughly thatched, the whitewash over the sun-dried brick was peeling and blotched like the skin on a leper's back. It was the only building there, other than the barn. It must be where she lived, Robert thought, though there wasn't space in it for more than two small rooms. He wondered who her husband was, and where he was, and what he did.

They walked for several minutes along the other path away from the house. The reeds were thicker now and higher. Soon they came to the bank of a wide canal.

"What work is it?" he asked again. Tethered to the reeds with a rope was a small flat raft. The woman pulled up her skirt. Underneath she had on a pair of wide baggy trousers secured by cord just below the knees. She tucked her skirt into the waistband of the trousers and jumped on to the raft.

"Work," she said, waiting for him to jump, "that I doubt you have ever done before. Come." She held out her hand, and as he jumped caught his arm to steady him.

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Hidden in the reeds beside the raft was a pole, and several rods of cane. When the woman had gathered them, she untied the rope and they drifted slowly down the canal. Her legs, Robert saw, were very smooth and very brown.

Every hundred feet or so the canal was crossed by another canal. Each patch of reeds, Robert saw, was a square surrounded by water on every side. They went on past three intersections. At the fourth the woman used the pole to turn the raft and then brought it into the bank. She jumped ashore with the cord in her hand and secured the raft to a clump of reeds.

"The rods," she commanded, "and the basket."

She cut in through the reeds, and Robert followed her. She turned and put one finger to her mouth. "Quietly now. They have good ears, and good eyes."

She walked in a circle. Soon Robert could see the water through the reeds. It shone in the early morning sun, and in the utter stillness and the quietness, like a blue-grey metal sheet.

Each of the rods had a circular groove cut into it near one end. The woman knelt in the reeds and reached into the basket and drew out a length of string. Tied to one end was a small hook, and above it a piece of red flannel. When she had tied the line into the groove and tightened it, she handed it to Robert.

"In a moment," she said, "I will show you what to do."

When she had made up another line she started to crawl forward through the reeds until she reached the edge of the canal. Then she jerked the rod and Robert saw the red flannel and the hook hit the flat surface of the canal. When the flannel had absorbed its fill of water it started to sink.

"And me too?" The woman nodded and Robert cast his line.

"When you feel a tug, jerk the rod and pull the line towards the bank." She spoke into his ear, her breath was warm on his face.

Robert still had no idea what they were after. He had fished sometimes in the sea, casting from the shore or trolling a spoon from a powered boat. He had never fished in a canal before, with a piece of red-coloured cloth. He watched the cloth sink and waited. He could hear the woman breathing. Apart from that there was no sound, it seemed, or movement in all the world.

Suddenly he felt a tug. He jerked the rod and pulled. It

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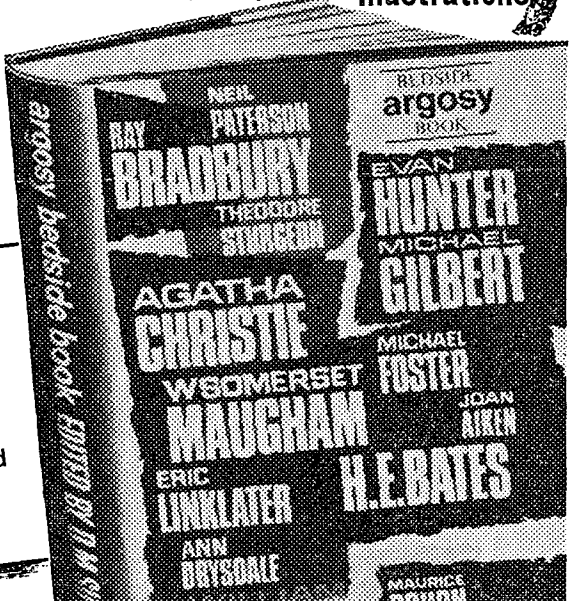

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was a moment or two before he saw what he had caught.

"Good heavens," he said in English, "what have I done?"

She took the frog from the hook and threw it in the basket and closed it with the lid.

"Next time you can take it off yourself." He saw the corner of her mouth move. He couldn't tell if it was disdain, or a smile.

They fished in silence for an hour. When there were twenty-eight frogs in the basket, the woman laid down her rod and lay back in the reeds.

"Let us smoke," she said.

"What do you do with them?"

"I take them to a man in the village. He sends them on a lorry to Paris. It is simple." She drew the smoke into her lungs and let the smoke out again shaped in two delicate whorls from her nostrils. "It is our livelihood."

"Do you eat them yourself?"

She turned her head and looked at him. "How ignorant you are. Only city people eat frogs. No-one eats them in the country." She stared at him for a long time, and again he saw the touch of amber in the whites of her eyes. "They are only fit for city men, for those with a delicate temperament, for lawyers and dealers in wine, and..." Still she stared at him, watching the effect of what she said in his eyes "...and students of philosophy, and homosexuals and foreigners seeking experiences in France they cannot find at home."

"Oh," said Robert. He could play this sort of game, he thought, as well as she. "And women perhaps who don't like men?"

"Perhaps—" she didn't smile—"or those who suffer from a lack of them."

By ten o'clock the sun was high. They moved to another place along the bank. They had in the basket more than sixty frogs.

She looked at the sun and stood up.

"I am going now. I have things to arrange at home." She touched the top of his head briefly with her hand. "I will bring you some food, and some wine at midday."

He watched her walk away through the reeds. He heard the swish of the raft through the water. When he lost the sound of it, he felt beautifully alone and at peace and undisturbed by anything.

Robert was a city man. He had lived amongst brick and stone and the noise of traffic all his life. If he closed his

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eyes against the present, as he often did, it was street corners that he saw and the lights in the windows of department stores and taxicabs and public parks and people. Always people, people in a hurry.

He had never been alone like this before, without movement or noise or the need to listen or the need to talk. Even at night in bed in towns there were always clocks and cats and distant cars.

He was asleep when she came back. She woke him with the cool touch of her foot against the warmth and the dryness of his skin. He had taken off his shirt.

"Here is something to eat, *voyageur*, some sausage for the frogs you have caught, and some bread for the time you have slept." She knelt beside him in the reeds. She had a warm faintly animal smell that pricked the senses, Robert noticed, like the smoke of a wood fire a long way away. "And for me some wine." She had a bottle and tilted it to the angle of her mouth. "I never drink it at home. It moves the flesh."

Robert ate. For a long time neither spoke. "I never drink at home. It moves the flesh." What an odd thing for a woman, for a wife to say. Robert turned the words over in his mind. She gave him the bottle, wiping the mouth of it first with her hand. When he had drunk and finished the food, Robert lay back in the reeds and watched a flight of wild duck turning and wheeling in the sky.

"Who are you," he asked, "and what is your husband?"

"Now who talks? The man who will answer no questions about himself now seeks to ask them of me. Ha!" She turned towards him leaning on her elbows, watching his face. "But if you wish I will trade question for question, answer for answer. No more, and no less."

"Very well," Robert said. "I am a student at a university."

"And I am the wife of a man."

"I have been a student at a university for two years. How long have you been the wife of a man?"

"For twelve years."

"For so long?"

"In my country a girl marries young."

"And what is your country?"

"Will you tell me your country?"

"No," said Robert.

"Then do not ask me mine."

They slept for an hour, and then they fished again for frogs. In the evening, when the sun had settled into a bank

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of clouds and coloured them with orange and with pink, they went back, he to the barn, and she to the hut of thatch and sun-dried brick. They didn't say anything where the path parted, nor did they wave or smile.

It was good to lie in the straw in the cool of the barn after the long day kneeling and crouching in the reeds under the sun. It was good to be thirsty and hungry and to know that in an hour or two there would be food and wine. It was good to be alone and to know that later she would come and talk to him in that quiet voice and to watch her impassive ageless face and to smell the warm tingling, disturbing smell that came each time she leaned over him.

It was odd, Robert thought, how much he had learned in a day, how much fishing for frogs with a strange woman in the empty silence of the reeds seemed to have changed his values and his perceptions. A lot of the things that had seemed important before in cities and in student atmospheres didn't seem to matter any more. What mattered now were the contrasts of sun and shade, of thirst and wine and lying alone in the straw waiting for someone to come.

He heard the door of the barn creak and saw her silhouette

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against the blue-black night. He shut his eyes and waited for whatever would happen next. She came across the floor of the barn, her bare feet sounded like a cat picking its way over the straw. He heard her put the wine and the food beside him, and the sound of her breathing. Outside an owl hooted.

There was no other sound for a long time. Robert kept his eyes closed. He wanted to know what, unseen, she would do. He knew already by instinct that she didn't want to be touched, he had known it all the time out there in the reeds. But perhaps, he thought, with compassion rather than with any male pride, she wanted to touch him. He was a stranger and whole and young. He had already guessed that whatever or whoever the man was with whom she shared the small hut, he wasn't an ordinary person.

But not for the first time that day what actually happened next came as a surprise to him. He felt her move, and then the first touch of her fingers as she began to unlace his shoes. When his shoes were off and his socks and his feet were bare, he opened his eyes.

"I wasn't asleep," he said.

"I know." She was still kneeling by his feet. "I knew from your breathing."

"Then why did you take off my shoes? It was a strange thing to do."

"Strange for you perhaps. You are a townsman, I can tell from your face, and your hands. But not for a peasant, like me. The first thing a peasant man does when he has worked all day is to take off his boots. You have been a peasant today. So I took off your shoes."

"I am glad," he said; "it feels better."

"Eat now. Are you hungry?"

"Yes."

When he had finished he lit a cigarette and gave it to her, and lit another for himself. "Is your husband ill?"

"Another question. If I answer it will you answer mine?"

"What is it?"

"How long will you stay here, catching frogs, and sleeping in the barn?"

"For a week, if you wish, or a month ... After that I must go."

"To return to your nameless studies at your nameless university?"

He nodded. He put his hand on her head in her thick

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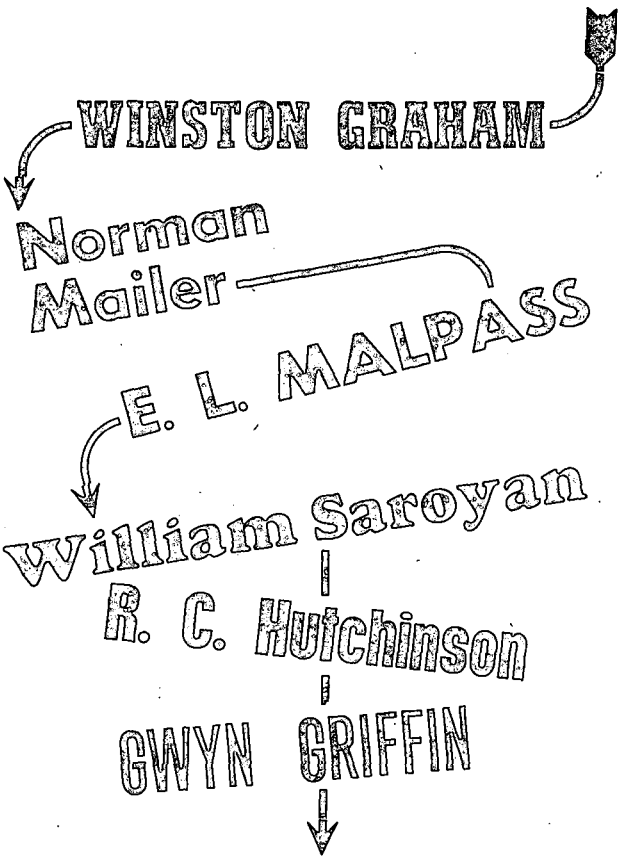

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dark hair and she let it lie there, neither accepting nor rejecting it.

"Yes," she said, after a short pause that seemed to Robert to go on for a long time. "My husband is ill."

Suddenly she pushed his hand away and stood up, brushing the straw from her clothes.

"I must go now. He is asleep, but I must go. He is my husband and I am his wife."

No-one, Robert thought afterwards, would have said that in America or in England. *He is my husband, and I am his wife.* It sounded fine in French and full of meaning. He wondered about the husband and about his illness, and his age, and his estate. He didn't know what the answers were, but he guessed somehow that if he ever discovered them they would be unexpected and outside his tame civilised experience.

The next day was like the first. She came for him early in the morning and they caught frogs, and she went away to attend to things in her house and came back again after midday with food and wine for him. It was very hot, and when he had eaten he went to sleep.

When he awoke he saw that she too had slept. She was still sleeping face downwards in the reeds. She had taken off her blouse. Her baggy trousers were patched and there was a small tear below the hip. Looking at her, Robert realised that she was brown in every part, and that the brown came not from the sun but from her ancestry. Now that he saw it, he wondered why he had not guessed it before, from her cheekbones or her eyes . . .

When he moved his head to look at her face he saw that she was awake and watching him.

"Does it offend you?" she asked.

She didn't move.

"No."

"Or disturb you?"

Robert didn't say anything. She sat up, her back towards him, and put on her blouse. "Let us continue," she said, "to fish for frogs."

"We have," Robert said, as the sun started to go down, "caught a hundred and nine today."

Apart from this no words passed between them all through the afternoon. At first the silence embarrassed Robert, he kept searching in his mind for small things to say. After a

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bit he got used to it, and in the end, by the time the evening came, he was pleased with it. As they walked back along the path he felt closer to her, and warmer because of the silence. It had become a bond, a sort of intimacy.

But later in the barn when she brought his food, they talked again.

"You have changed, monsieur." Despite the bond of the afternoon's silence, and the nakedness that he knew he had been meant to see, they still spoke very formally to one another. "In two days you have changed."

"In what ways?"

He knew he had changed, he knew that he would never be the same Robert as before.

"For one thing now you are beginning to smell like a man. When you arrived you smelt of... of nothing. You were like an apple that has been washed and scrubbed and polished and put in a shop window. Now you have the sun in you, and wine and the reeds, and straw and frogs and sweat."

"In what other ways have I changed?"

"You have changed in the matter of curiosity."

For one who keeps saying that she is just a peasant,

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BRITAIN'S BRIGHTEST AND BEST GARDENING WEEKLY

EDITED BY GORDON FORSYTH

Popular GARDENING

EVERY THURSDAY 8d

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Robert thought, she is very intelligent, and very quick.

"At first you were not curious. To protect your own anonymity you asked no questions, not even in your mind. It was as if you were escaping from something, and you knew that if you started to inquire about others they would start to inquire about you. But now, despite yourself, you are curious. You are curious about me and you are curious about the man in the hut over there. Is that not true, monsieur?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes. It is true."

"Shall I tell you?" she teased. "Shall I tell you?"

"Yes. Tell me."

She looked at him for a long time. "I will tell you tomorrow perhaps. I cannot do it now. He may awaken and need me..." Again she used the phrase she had used the night before.

"He is my husband and I am his wife."

When she had gone Robert lay in the straw and wondered whether it might not be better if he went away now, before he heard whatever it was that she had to say. He got up and went to the door of the barn, and listened and heard nothing but the night wind in the reeds. He walked along the path to the place where it divided. He paused there, and then started to walk barefooted along the track that led to the hut. There was a tree near the hut—it was a walnut tree with a broad gnarled trunk.

Robert stood with his back to the tree and listened, and watched.

The window was shuttered, and the door of the hut was closed. There was no sign of light under the door, or between the divisions of the rough wooden window boards. Nor was there any sound of life or movement or joy or pain. There was no sound at all.

Robert walked back along the path and lay in the straw in the dark warm barn. He still thought it would be better if he went away but he knew now that he would stay.

When the next afternoon out in the reeds he had eaten the food she brought him and drunk the wine, she turned to him.

"If I tell you who I am and who my husband is, will you tell me who you are and from what country you come?"

"No," Robert said, and smiled.

"Are you no longer curious then?"

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"Yes. But not as much as that." Again he smiled. He knew now that she would tell him. He didn't know why, but he knew that for some reason she wanted to tell him.

There was a long silence. She had closed her eyes and eased her blouse off her shoulders but she didn't take it off.

Her shoulders were very smooth and they gleamed in the sun.

"My husband," she started, "was a *pied noir*. Do you know what that means?"

A *pied noir*. A black foot. Robert had never heard the phrase before. He shook his head.

"It is a name the French of France gave to the French who settled in Algeria. The soil was dark, it stained the arms and the legs of the men who worked it.

"He had lived in Algeria all his life. He was born there. And his father. And his father's father. It was his country. He had no other. Like the English who a hundred years ago went to Australia."

He knew she was watching him, watching his eyes and his mouth, probing for his nationality.

"And the Germans and the Italians and the Dutch who went to America. Do you understand?" Suddenly her voice was harsh and hostile.

"Yes," said Robert, "I understand."

"Ten years ago the Nationalists, the *FLN*, started to fight the French. My husband was a farmer. He did not concern himself with the fighting. He was not interested in politics, or in oppression or in freedom. His only loyalty was to his land.

"One day they came." She started to speak now in short dry sentences. There was no emotion in her voice, no bitterness or hate or pride. Just facts. She looked at Robert full in the face as she spoke.

"One day they came. It was early in the morning. There were six of them. Five were dark-skinned and one was white. They all had guns. One man came to the door and knocked. 'Come out,' he said.

"My husband opened the door and went out. He did not take a gun.

"'Who are you?' he asked.

"'We are the *FLN*.'

"'So?' he said. 'What do you want? If it is food you can have it.'

"'We want you,' they said.

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"'Why?' he asked.

"'You are a Frenchman.'

"'I am of Algeria. Like my father, and my father's father. What harm have I done?'

"'The harm you have done is that you have done no harm. The people of the village like you, your labourers say you are kind to them and just.'

"'So?'

"'Men like you are dangerous to us. People say he is a good man. He gives us work, he pays us good wages, he uses the land well, he even cares for us when we are sick and old. So why fight such men? Let them stay. They are good for the country.'

"'So?' my husband asked again.

"'With men like you about our people forget to hate. And if they do not hate how shall we succeed in making Algeria free?'

"My husband said nothing. He just stood there and looked at them. One of the men went up to him and reversed his gun and hit him on the head. He fell down. Another man drew a machete and cut off my husband's right hand.

"I was in the house watching. My husband had told me to stay in the house. When I saw what they were doing I rushed out. Two of the men caught and held me. Then they maimed him and finally they destroyed his manhood. I had shut my eyes.

"'Open your eyes, woman,' they said. 'It is finished.' They spoke in Arabic. They knew I was one of them. 'Now perhaps he will learn to hate us. And as he hates, so will he become hated. Then the purpose of our cause will be achieved.'

"I too spoke in Arabic. I said many harsh things to them. I thought they would kill me. But they did not. Then I turned to the white man who was with them.

"'Who are you?' I asked.

"'I am English. I too am fighting on the side of freedom.'

"I spat in his face. 'What guns are those you have?'

"'They are American,' they said, 'given to us by supporters of our cause in the States. We have many friends.'

"They turned and walked away. When they had gone I dragged my husband's body into the house. He was a big man. I could not carry him."

The woman's voice died away, it was very quiet out there

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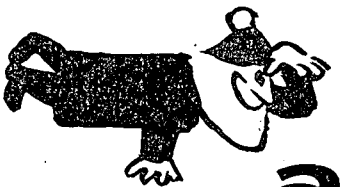

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in the reeds and the canals. There were many questions Robert wanted to ask but he didn't say anything. After a while the woman got up and went on fishing for frogs. Robert did the same. He wondered why she had told him the story.

The only thing he knew was that she wouldn't have told him unless she had a reason for it.

That night in the barn, when she brought his food, she was very quiet. She gave him no greeting, and put the food and the wine beside him without a word. And yet she made no move to go.

"When did you come to France?" he asked.

"Four years ago. We sold our land. It was in a dangerous area. We got very little for it. My husband would not stay.

"He couldn't work because of his hand and his . . . other injuries. The Government, the French Government, gives grants to people like us, to the homeless ones of Algeria. But my husband would not take the grant. He wouldn't take anything. It isn't only the Arabs he hates now. He hates de Gaulle, because he came to terms with the Arabs; he hates the English because of the man who had come that day; he hates the Americans because of the guns. He hates everyone."

"And you," Robert asked, "does he hate you too?"

It was a long time before she answered. In the barn a rat stirred, scuffling the straw, and outside, in the distance, an owl hooted.

"Yes. He hates me too."

"Because of your blood? Because of your race?"

"No. Not because of that. I am only half an Arab. My mother was a woman of the country, but my father was a Frenchman, a soldier, an NCO . . ."

"Then why does he hate you, if not for that?"

"He hates me because he is dependent on me. And because I am a woman . . . and he is no more a man."

"Yes," said Robert after a long pause, "I see."

"You see! *You see!*" There was an acre of scorn in her voice. "What do you see? What do you understand of such things?"

Suddenly she knelt by his side. She took up one of his hands.

"Look at your hands. They are soft. You have never

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worked with them. Look at your face. It is a face that has never known pain, or cruelty, or hate. It is a boy's face. How can you understand?"

"All the same," Robert said quietly, "I understand."

She looked at him intently, her face close; her dark eyes were like a long corridor and at the end a point of light. She took one of his hands, and spread the fingers out and put it on her thigh, and held it there. For a long time neither spoke.

Suddenly she stood up and moved away from him. "Come with me," she said. She went out of the barn. Robert followed her.

She had left a lamp burning in the hut and the door open. She turned in the doorway and called to Robert to come inside. She didn't lower her voice.

"Will he not wake up?"

"No. I have given him something. Something to make him sleep."

The hut was divided into two compartments by a thin screen of reeds. There was a table in one room, and two chairs and a cooker and behind it a cylinder of gas. In the other room beyond the reed screen was a bed.

The man sleeping on the bed had a fine head—the nose curved and the jaw strong and aggressive and clear cut. Only the mouth was old, and the lines at the corner of the eyes, hopeless and bitter and harsh. The dark hair was matted and long, uncut and unkempt.

The woman went to the bed, and touched the man's face. "His name is Pierre." There was love in her touch, and tenderness.

Suddenly she pulled back the sheet. The man was naked. Robert looked at the mutilations and the maimed wasted legs. He looked for a moment, and turned his head away.

The woman drew the sheet back over the body and bent and kissed her husband's head. Robert walked to the door and went out into the darkness of the night. The stars were very clear and bright, and there was a sharp crescent of moon and a slow warm wind that stirred the leaves of the walnut tree outside the hut.

"Now do you see?" She had come up quietly behind him, he hadn't heard the movement of her bare feet on the earth. "Now do you understand?"

Robert didn't say anything. He felt as if in an hour of

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talking and looking he had grown a dozen years and more.

"He wants to die." The woman's voice was very soft now, soft and insistent like sensuous hands. "He wants to die, but he has too much will for life to do it himself. And I...I have not enough courage, and too much love."

Still Robert said nothing. He was surprised to see that in this strange faraway place the stars were the same as the summer stars of England and of his calm uncomplicated boyhood in California.

"He has nothing to live for now. No right hand, no strength, no manhood, no hope. He has nothing left but hate." She moved and stood in front of him, her hands gripped his shirt, her thighs leaned on him so that he felt them smooth and taut and warm under the fabric of her skirt. "Now is the time for it. Now..."

At last Robert understood. Everything that had happened in the last few days, every word spoken, every act fell into focus and into place.

"No," he said. "No. I can't do it. I can't kill him." He tried to wrest her hands from his shirt, and to separate his flesh from her.

"Yes," she said, softly still. "You can. Although you have the face of a boy, you have the shape and the strength of a man. Now you can prove to yourself and to me, if you wish, that you also have the courage of a man, and the compassion."

Robert shook his head. Again he tried to disengage himself.

"He has a gun. Afterwards we will wipe it clean and put it in his left hand. No-one will be surprised. It is what they expect, and they will take him away and bury him, and no-one will know."

"No," Robert said. At last he freed himself from her. He started to walk away.

She followed him and caught his legs, abasing herself on the ground, pleading.

"I implore you. Help me, for pity's sake."

Robert stared at her. He wanted to go, to get away; he didn't want to listen any more. But he didn't move, it was as if his legs wouldn't follow his will. One part of his mind was already working on the mechanics of the problem, on the how and the when and on what they would do afterwards. Already it wasn't what he would do, it was what they would do, the two of them...

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She watched his face. She was still kneeling, clasping his legs.

"Help me," she said again. "Help me." The tears scoured pale furrows in the texture of her face. "I am desperate."

Robert reached out and took her face in his hands. Suddenly his mind was clear, he knew what he had to do.

"Is it his release you seek," he asked, "or yours?"

She started to speak, to protest her altruism and then turned her head away.

Robert released her hands, and freed his legs from her grasp and walked on.

Again she followed him. But this time when she faced him her eyes were hard with anger and with scorn. First reason, Robert thought, then pleading and now anger.

"I said that you had the shape and the strength of a man. But you are only the shell of a man, an emptiness of man. There is a saying among my people that a man is not a man until he has killed a man and raped a woman. And you will do neither, not if you live a hundred years. You are soft, like all your kind..."

"What is my kind?" Robert asked.

She spat on the ground at his feet. She did not make any other reply.

Robert walked on, and this time she didn't follow him. At the junction of the path he looked back once. She had not moved, but he could see from her attitude that the argument and the pleading and the offering and the anger and the scorn had all gone. There was nothing left now in the way she stood but hopelessness.

He took his bicycle from the barn and his rucksack and walked along the track that led to the road. He saw the lights of a car driving fast towards the north. It was his first contact with the outside world, the ordinary, everyday world. He had been away from it, it seemed, for a long time. He was glad to be back, it was good to be on familiar ground, to be himself again.

He was glad, all the same, that he had not told her his nationality. He was still a man of no country in her eyes, he would always be that perhaps in her mind. A man of no country, yes, that was what he wanted her to remember him as. He felt better about it that way, and cleaner.

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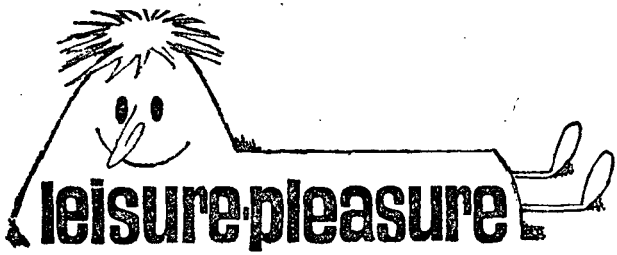

cool drinking

IT is not necessary to be a wine snob to wish to give one's guests an interesting wine that they have never drunk before. To anyone with a real interest in wines, the search for those that are new, outside their own region, or quite out of the ordinary, is a fascinating, often rewarding, and not necessarily expensive experience. The first step is to seek out the comparatively small number of firms who specialise in the lesser-known wines.

Among them are Williams Standring, of Duke Street, Grosvenor Square, London, who have been in business for over 200 years. They have put on to the market a remarkable red wine from the Loire, Champigny Anjou, 1955 vintage, bottled at the Château de Chaintre, in bottles embossed with the crest of the proprietor. It is a vigorous, powerful wine, comparable in quality with those of Burgundy and Bordeaux, and it surprised the experts to discover that this district, which is just in Anjou across the border from the Coteaux de Saumur, could produce such a wine. Ten years in bottle, it has a heavy crust; it needs to be stood up for 12 hours or more, so that the deposit can fall to the bottom, and then decanted carefully. The price is about 17s. 6d. per bottle.

Those who travel the road to Spain will remember the fine old town of Cahors, on the river Lot—and it is pronounced Lot—not Lo—and may have stayed at the Château de Mercues, perched on a rock on its outskirts. Cahors is the home of the unusual red wine known locally as "The Black Wine," because of its colour. Costing about 9s. per bottle, it is a first-class companion for such dishes as Irish stew and jugged hare. Decanted, it gets the experts guessing as to its origin. Williams Standring are among those who ship it.

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Another firm specialising in out-of-the-ordinary wines are Asher Storey; as importers, they sell through wine merchants. In their list are some delightful and inexpensive white wines as well as some notable reds. They include two red wines of the Loire, not nearly so well known as the whites, namely Chinon, costing about 12s. for the 1960, and Bourgueil 1959 at about 13s. 6d. The same firm specialises in the wines from a lovely and little-known region of France, the Jura, which include the delicate Blanc de Blancs, Côtes du Jura, and the robust Grand Vin Rouge d'Arbois.

Rosé wines have achieved a great popularity in recent years in Britain, but among the lesser known, both shipped by Findlater, Mackie, Todd, are the South African Rosamond at about 7s. 6d. per bottle, and the Portuguese Rosalinna, about one shilling dearer.

The Jura produces a charming rosé wine, Marnebour, which has a distinctive red-brown colour. John Harvey have it, among other merchants, at 10s. 6d.

Among the out-of-the-ordinary sherries are those bottled in Spain, as distinct from the United Kingdom, and the Montilla wines that come from Cordoba, not from the much more famous region of Jerez. Among the Spanish bottled sherries new to the British market are the Diestro Reserva Especial range made by the Ruiz Mateus family. Shipped by Duthie and Co., each bottle is numbered. The Montilla wines, distinguished by their light golden colour and soft roundness, were drunk widely until 1914 in Britain and then disappeared from the market. It is only quite recently that they have reappeared. Making a pleasant change, they cost about 15s. per bottle.

Should you want to do someone really well, bothering not too much about the cost but giving them something they have probably never drunk before, as an aperitif offer them, instead of sherry, a glass of the unique Château Chalon from the Jura. Pale golden and dry, it is left in cask for at least six years, covered with a flor like sherry. Reputed to be the longest lived unfortified wine in the world, it costs about 35s. per bottle. Asher Storey ship it, but as the quantity is small it is not easy to find. An alternative would be an old dry Sercial Madeira, costing about one guinea per bottle from John Harvey. They have also a wonderful Solera 1824, at 60s. 6d. A lot of money? Yes, but not too high a price for a memorable experience.

John Baker White

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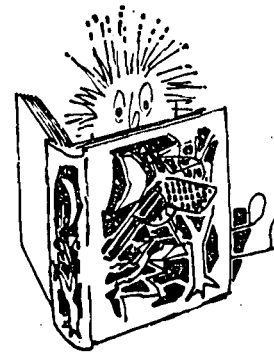

bookshelf

THAT spinner of superb stories, Margery Allingham, is at her hair-raising best in her new book, *The Mind Readers.* This time, Albert Campion and his wife Amanda find themselves involved in the strange science fiction world of ESP—extra-sensory perception to you.

Our boffins have been busy and the top scientists of Russia and Japan, as well as an unpleasant tycoon, Lord Ludor, are after what they have.

What they have is a formula—which will enable a person to read the thoughts and know the feelings of any other person. Naturally there is a fight for possession of the formula.

On the side of law and order, apart from Campion and his wife, is that endearing priest whom we met last in "Tiger in the Smoke," the serene and practical Canon Avril, and Superintendent Charles Luke of the Central Office. (But where is our old friend Lugg?)

The pace is terrific and Campion has never been nearer a sudden and savage death. (Chatto and Windus, 21s.)

For a glimpse of the Highlands, we turn to Compton Mackenzie's *The Stolen Soprano.* This is written in the same happy vein as his "Whisky Galore" and "The Monarch of the Glen."

It all starts when that dour pastor, Mr. Munro, is unwise enough to pronounce the Campbells and the Macdonalds equal in the sight of the Lord, a shocking heresy if ever there was one. This leads to the suspicion of a Campbell plot to prevent Flora Macdonald from winning a gold medal in a singing competition. (Chatto and Windus, 21s.)

Mary Stewart is another splendid storyteller and her new book, *Airs Above The Ground,* will undoubtedly make the

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best-seller lists here and in America as did her other books.

The "airs above the ground" of the title are the beautiful leaps and elegant dancing steps made by the famous Lipizzaner stallions. One of the best parts of this book is the description of an old horse out to grass, hearing from the distance the once familiar fanfare of trumpets that introduced the music of the Lipizzaner routine.

The old horse stopped grazing. His neck arched; his ears pricked and his head moved "with a graceful almost ceremonial movement of conscious beauty. Slowly, all by himself, bowing his head to his shadow on the turf, he began to dance."

But the white stallions are only part of the story; there is the attractive Vanessa searching for her husband who has disappeared; young Timothy who has his own batch of troubles, and the slim, dangerous Sandor—the star attraction of the circus on the highwire. Adding to the tension, a delicate mission is afoot involving security forces. (Hodder and Stoughton, 18s.)

Eric Linklater, an author well known to Argosy readers, is in his element retelling the story of one of the greatest manhunts in history. *The Prince In The Heather* is, of course, Bonnie Prince Charlie. A marked man, with a large price on his head, he flees for his life after the disastrous defeat at Culloden. The author tells this incredible story using contempory sources and some wonderful photographs taken by Don Kelly. (Hodder and Stoughton, 25s.)

The Concubine, by Norah Lofts, is one of the new paperbacks. It's a fascinating and frightening book about Anne Boleyn and her terrible lover, Henry VIII. (Arrow, 5s.)

Also in paperback, Desmond Bagley's *The Golden Keel.* This is a novel about an adventurous and perilous quest for Mussolini's missing treasure. (Fontana, 3s. 6d.)

Two war books in paperback—*The Phantom Major* which is Virginia Cowles' factual account of how it happened that a corpse was washed up on enemy-occupied coast with top-secret plans concealed on his person. (Fontana, 5s.)

The second war book is a novel—*From Here to Eternity,* by James Jones. This is an extremely tough and bawdy book about our American allies on and off the field of battle. (Fontana, 6s.)

Jan Dehane

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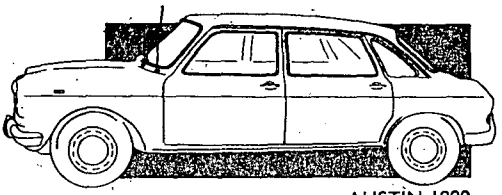
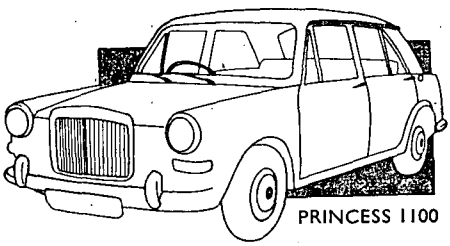


AUSTIN 1800



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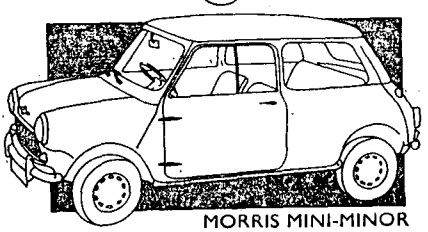

MORRIS MINI-MINOR

man about cars tests and compares the Mini and its two big sisters

THE Mini is one of the few cars that has become a legend in its own lifetime. So it was fascinating to have the chance to test not only the Mini, but its two grown-up sisters, the Princess 1100 and the Austin 1800.

All three cars now share the same basic design principles, but vary widely in size and in the degree of interior luxury.

Externally, the Mini stands out as the least styled of the three, both the 1100 and the 1800 having the added grace of Pininfarina's hand.

Armed with a de luxe Mini, a de luxe 1800 and a very de luxe 1100, I set out to find out how the same revolutionary transverse engine layout and hydrolastic suspension compares with the different size and power of these three cars.

I started with the Austin 1800. It has an appearance that grows on one, and a very purposeful air. At first sight, the cut-off tail fins look rather odd. Nevertheless, the 1800 is a car which will not appear out of date in ten years' time.

The BMC B-type engine of 1,798 c.c. provides the 1800 with

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very adequate power, pushing it up to 50 m.p.h. in 11 seconds. It has a top speed of just over 90 m.p.h. which seems to me a sensible maximum for a family saloon.

It started easily on a 1 in 4 hill, but it was beyond my strength to hold it on this slope with its particular type of handbrake. But with the exception of the handbrake, which is difficult to reach, the controls are neatly arranged and quite convenient to use. The handling is well up to the Mini standard. Something not so pleasant is that BMC have fitted very low-geared steering because of the extra weight of the bigger engine on the front wheels. I think they have been much too cautious. Higher gearing, despite the heavier feel, would make it a more restful car to drive, especially winding in and out of town traffic. At high speed the 1800 handles extremely well, corners going by almost unnoticed.

The finish is quiet with a simple but extremely effective ventilation system consisting of variable louvres at each end of the facia. This allows cool air to be directed to almost any part of the car.

Front seats are roomy, but unfortunately have little shaping, so that passengers are thrown around during fast driving. This could possibly be minimised if safety belts were fitted. There's plenty of leg room in the back and three adults can sit in perfect comfort. In fact the 1800 is one of the few cars that is ideal for family use, with space and luggage room in plenty. Yet it is lively enough with suitable handling to suit the more sporty motorist.

The Austin Princess 1100 is rather more expensive, with more refinements on its interior fittings. It is not a fantastically fast car but it's certainly no sluggard. It is smaller in passenger accommodation and luggage space.

It looks quite similar to the 1800 but with rather sharper features and with the distinctive Vanden Plas Princess radiator grill neatly blending into the 1100 body style.

Top speed is just on 85 m.p.h. and is not quite as fast as you would expect in a car of this price. Nevertheless, the Princess 1100 is a remarkably quick point-to-point car due, no doubt, to its superb road holding.

Acceleration is quite good—0 to 50 m.p.h. taking fourteen seconds. The Princess 1100 restarted with some wheelspin on a damp 1 in 4 hill and the handbrake held satisfactorily.

The controls are neat and easy to reach although pedals are a little close. The clutch pedal in the test car was too

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near the central hump for me to find anywhere to rest my foot. But the handling was superb—easy to park as well, since you can see all four corners.

Front seat comfort, as you would expect, is excellent, with plenty of fore and aft adjustment of thickly-padded leather seats, plus adjustment for rake by means of a small handle. Rear seats are also comfortable, but there is less leg room.

On the whole, finish is very good, with masses of walnut for the sill cappings, facia and picnic tables in rear seats. The roof is cloth lined and good quality; the carpet is well fitted throughout. Thick felt is fitted underneath the carpet and across the engine bulkhead. Under most conditions the car is incredibly quiet but there is some exhaust resonance on the over-run from high speed. There is no doubt about it, this is an exceedingly comfortable and nippy smallish car that has hotel commissionaires leaping to park it for you.

The Mini, of course, needs no introduction. It has won its place in people's affection much as did its honourable forebear, the original Austin 7.

In looks, the Mini can best be described as neat and functional. It is not a beautiful car but it is pleasant-looking.

With a top speed of 74 m.p.h. and acceleration figures of 0-50 m.p.h. in sixteen seconds, the Mini is very lively for its engine size. Add to this its lack of thirst (nearly 40 miles to the gallon) and you have quite a car. The 1 in 4 hill proved no problem for a restart or on a brake test.

Where controls are concerned, the Mini does not shine too brightly. The very upright driving position is most noticeable and it is difficult not to crouch over the wheel. Also, the switches are just out of convenient reach.

Comfort is obviously not up to the standard of the 1800 or the Princess but it is still good, specially for this size of car.

Certainly using a transverse engine layout for these three cars has produced enormous internal space in relation to outside dimensions, and the suspension system used has probably combined more of the desirable elements for everyday motoring than any other system yet devised.

CAR	LENGTH	PRICE INC. P.T.
Austin 1800 de luxe	13ft.8¼in.	£872 15s. 5d.
Princess 1100 de luxe	12ft. 3¼in.	£925 18s. 9d.
Mini-Minor de luxe	10ft. 0¼in.	£515 2s. 1d.

Keith Fletcher

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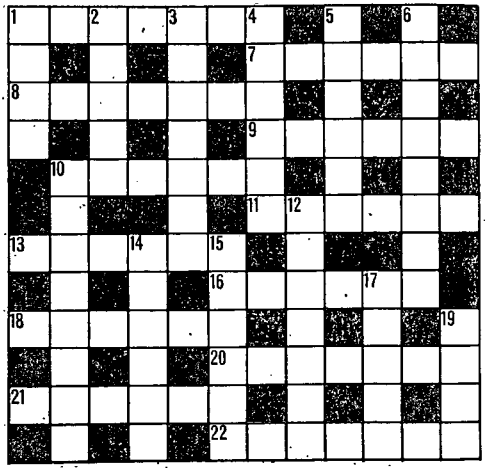
TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Crimson from battle (7).
7 He should be at school! (6).
8 Conveyance of goods? (7).
9 It's only natural (6).
10 Ear-piercing (6).
11 Herald's silver (6).
13 They give the thumbs-up sign! (6).
16 Duty paid — with reverence? (6).
18 Spanish coin (6).
20 Canal-boat (7).
21 Of pearls? (6).
22 Veil taken by Moslem women (7).

DOWN

1 Chummy shrub (4).
2 Curve of figures! (5).
3 In tears (anag.) (7).
4 King of the Huns (6).
5 A sweet—deception? (6).



6 Coming on—to delight (8).
10 Sharp heel! (8).
12 Diary entry does? (7).
14 Takes the lashes! (6).
15 Dog story? (6).
17 Goes with bride! (5).
19 Apostle's money? (4).

(Solution below)

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (OCTOBER ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Motel.* 4, *Amaryllis.* 9, *Dried up.* 10, *Silence.* 11, *Unit.* 12, *Paint.* 13, *Mean.* 16, *Minaret.* 17, *Chianti.* 19, *Rackets.* 22, *English.* 24, *Seed.* 25, *Bower.* 26, *Doer.* 29, *Airship.* 30, *Elegant.* 31, *Munitions.* 32, *Steer.*

Down. 1, *Midsummer.* 2, *Tuition.* 3, *Lady.* 4, *Asphalt.* 5, *Arsenic.* 6, *Yell.* 7, *Lantern.* 8, *Skean.* 14, *Creel.* 15, *Midge.* 18, *Inheritor.* 20, *Chevron.* 21, *Scorpio.* 22, *Eyeless.* 23, *Iron Age.* 24, *Swarm.* 27, *Chat.* 28, *Ness.*

SOLUTION TO TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS. 1, Magenta. 7, Truant. 8, Transit. 9, Inborn. 10, Shrill. 11, Argent. 13, Hikers. 16, Homage. 18, Peseta. 20, Gondola. 21, String. 22, Yashmak.

DOWN. 1, Mate. 2, Graph. 3, Nastier. 4, Attila. 5, Humbug. 6, Entrance. 10, Stiletto. 12, Reminds. 14, Eyelid. 15, Shaggy. 17, Groom. 19, Mark.

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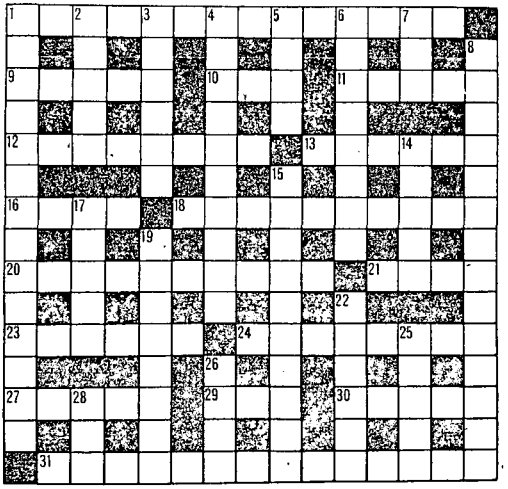
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Tune composed by a ghost? (8, 6).

9 After this, Jack goes on the staff (5).

10 They swear by it in Yorkshire! (3).

11 In London, a directory includes the lowest (5).

12 Garden and gallery for the toothless? (8).

13 Weigh up the value of some fool female (6).

16 Street of the wealthy! (4).

18 Expert enough to have been a teacher? (10).

20 Study in the Middle East (10).

21 Edge forward on foot (4).

23 Not the right voice for a duet? (6).

24 Boatman I knocked about in Canada! (8).

27 Take it easy after six when somebody calls (5).

29 It's a bit of a liberty for him to appear! (3).

30 Some sort of roll of foreigners? (5).

31 Heavenly performer on a disc? (9, 5).

DOWN

1 He finds out where there's accommodation? (5, 9).

2 Join up with that idiot inside! (5).

3 Set of ten principles? (6).

4 One big tale that may be sold (10).

5 Baby Doll calls for her if pressed (4).

6 Puts ashore someone who hasn't got his sea-legs (8).

7 Whichever way you look, he's a father! (3).

8 Not needed before the nude show opens? (5-9).

14 Absorbed! (5).

15 No women in the country so nothing doing! (10).

17 Ancient writing-implement (5).

19 Taffy took both (5, 3).

22 It's unwholesome trying to disguise that I am Sam (6).

25 You've got it coming to you! (5).

26 Form a league (4).

28 Vision required to be a bishop! (3).

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MAKE WRITING YOUR HOBBY THIS WINTER

The broadcast by the BBC entitled "Can I Learn to be a Writer?" was based on interviews with the senior coach of the London School of Journalism and some of our successful students who spoke of the help they had received in attaining their success.

Their testimony was reinforced by the editress of a great national periodical who spoke of the need for competent instruction in the writing of features intended for publication.

Further tributes to the LSJ were broadcast last year on January 28th, March 1st and October 20th.

A warning was given about the doubtful value of the claims made by certain schools. If you seek our advice, you will not be lured by lavish promises or bombarded with letters urging enrolment upon you. If you decide to become a member, you will work under a personal coach and your work will be fully criticised and returned promptly . . . no waiting for weeks or even months.

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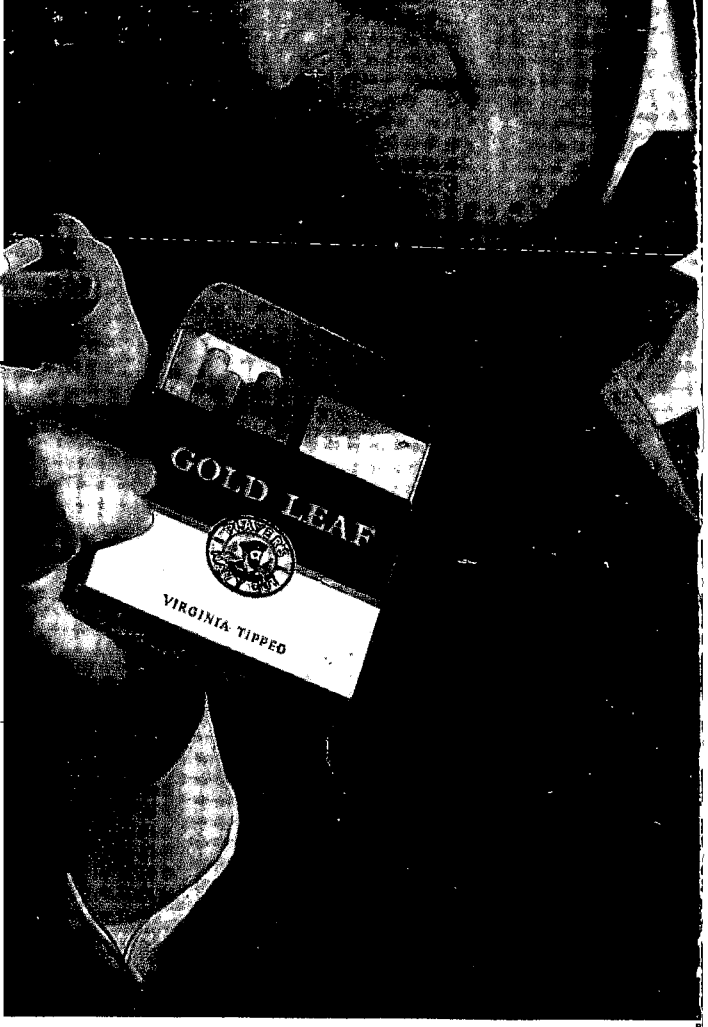

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